

ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN FILM STUDIES

# Moralizing Cinema

Film, Catholicism and Power

Edited by  
Daniel Biltereyst and  
Daniela Treveri Gennari



# Moralizing Cinema

“Finally, an investigation that demonstrates the close negotiation between film policies and filmmakers, power and art, ethics and aesthetics, as influenced by a variety of Catholic-inspired initiatives. This is a much-needed intervention into the study of film and culture alike, particularly essential in a day and age when the scrutiny of the power yielded by Catholic institutions is ever more pressing.”

—Ernest Mathijs, *University of British Columbia, Canada*

“This is a timely book providing well-researched case studies about the historical influence of religious organizations (in this case the Catholic Church) in the production, distribution, exhibition and consumption of films, from policies and leaders to censorship and audiences. A required text for cinema and media students and scholars interested in a comprehensive analysis of a relevant but under-researched topic.”

—Jose-Carlos Lozano, *Texas A&M International University, Laredo, USA*

This volume is part of the recent interest in the study of religion and popular media culture (cinema in particular), but it strongly differs from most of this work in this maturing discipline. Contrary to most other edited volumes and monographs on film and religion, *Moralizing Cinema* does not focus upon films (cf. the representation of biblical figures, religious themes in films, the fidelity question in movies), but rather, looks beyond the film text, content or aesthetics by concentrating on the cinema-related actions, strategies and policies developed by the Catholic Church and Catholic organizations in order to influence cinema. Whereas the key role of Catholics in cinema has been well studied in the United States (cf. literature on the Legion of Decency and on the Catholic-influenced Production Code Administration), the issue remains unexplored for other parts of the world. The book includes case studies on Argentina, Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United States.

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 Samuel Amago
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 Valerie Wee
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 Framing Fatherhood  
 Hannah Hamad
- 29 Cine-Ethics**  
 Ethical Dimensions of Film Theory, Practice, and Spectatorship  
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 Edited by Rebecca Weaver-Hightower and Peter Hulme
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 Gender, Narrative, and History  
 Alison L. McKee
- 32 Iranian Cinema in a Global Context**  
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 Edited by Peter Decherney and Blake Atwood
- 33 Eco-Trauma Cinema**  
 Edited by Anil Narine
- 34 American and Chinese-Language Cinemas**  
 Examining Cultural Flows  
 Edited by Lisa Funnell and Man-Fung Yip
- 35 American Documentary Filmmaking in the Digital Age**  
 Depictions of War in Burns, Moore, and Morris  
 Lucia Ricciardelli
- 36 Asian Cinema and the Use of Space**  
 Interdisciplinary Perspectives  
 Edited by Lilian Chee and Edna Lim
- 37 Moralizing Cinema**  
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# **Moralizing Cinema**

Film, Catholicism and Power

**Edited by Daniel Biltereyst  
and Daniela Treveri Gennari**

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# Contents

<i>List of figures and tables</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv

<b>Catholics, Cinema and Power: An Introduction</b>	1
DANIEL BILTEREYST AND DANIELA TREVERI GENNARI	

## **PART I** **Policies**

<b>1 Resisting the Lure of the Modern World: Catholics, International Politics and the Establishment of the International Catholic Office for Cinema (1918–1928)</b>	19
GUIDO CONVENTS	
<b>2 The Roman Catholic Church, Cinema and the “Culture of Dialogue”: Italian Catholics and the Movies after the Second World War</b>	35
DARIO EDOARDO VIGANÒ	
<b>3 The Rise and Fall of Catholic Hollywood, or from the Production Code to <i>The Da Vinci Code</i></b>	49
THOMAS DOHERTY	
<b>4 Catholicism and Mexican Cinema: A Secular State, a Deeply Conservative Society and a Powerful Catholic Hierarchy</b>	66
FRANCISCO PEREDO CASTRO	

## **PART II** **Leaders**

<b>5 Jean Bernard’s Fight For ‘Good’ Cinema in Luxembourg</b>	85
PAUL LESCH	

- 6 **An Alternative Way of Moralizing Cinema: Father Flipo's Remedy for the Catholic Church's Propaganda Failure in France (1945–1962)** 100  
MÉLISANDE LEVENTOPOULOS
- 7 **A Triple Alliance for a Catholic Neorealism: Roberto Rossellini According to Felix Morlion, Giulio Andreotti and Gian Luigi Rondi** 114  
ELENA DAGRADA

### **PART III**

#### **Technology and Production**

- 8 **A Catholic Voice in Talking Pictures: The International Eidophon Company (1930–1934)** 137  
KAREL DIBBETS
- 9 **Pius XII as Actor and Subject: On the Representation of the Pope in Cinema during the 1940s and 1950s** 158  
FEDERICO RUOZZI
- 10 **The Failed Project of a Catholic Neorealism: On Giulio Andreotti, Felix Morlion and Roberto Rossellini** 173  
TOMASO SUBINI

### **PART IV**

#### **Censorship and Control**

- 11 **Protectionism and Catholic Film Policy in Twentieth-Century Ireland** 189  
KEVIN ROCKETT
- 12 **A Case of *Entente Cordiale* between State and Church: Catholics and Film Control in Argentina (1954–1984)** 203  
MARIA ELENA DE LAS CARRERAS
- 13 **The 'Ideal Film': On the Transformation of the Italian Catholic Film and Media Policy in the 1950s and the 1960s** 221  
MARIAGRAZIA FANCHI

**PART V**

**Exhibition and Cinema-Going Experiences**

- |           |  |            |
|-----------|--|------------|
| <b>14</b> | <b>Separating the Sheep from the Goats: Gendering Space in the Cinema Auditorium in Rucphen (1929)</b>                                       | <b>239</b> |
|           | THUNNIS VAN OORT   |            |
| <b>15</b> | <b>“I Think Catholics Didn’t Go to the Cinema”: Catholic Film Exhibition Strategies and Cinema-Going Experiences in Belgium, 1930s–1960s</b> | <b>255</b> |
|           | DANIEL BILTEREYST  |            |
| <b>16</b> | <b>Moralizing Cinema While Attracting Audiences: Catholic Film Exhibition in Post-War Rome</b>   | <b>272</b> |
|           | DANIELA TREVERI GENNARI  |            |
|           | <i>Contributors</i>  | 287        |
|           | <i>Index</i>   | 291        |

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# Figures and Tables

## FIGURES

- 1.1 Canon Abel Brohée, president of *the International Catholic Office for Cinema* (OCIC) from 1933 until 1947. Source: Editor's personal archive. 25
- 3.1 The most powerful pressure group in the history of Hollywood cinema: members of the Legion of Decency of the Archdiocese of New York meet at the Empire State Club in New York to keep Hollywood on the straight and narrow. Left to right, front row: James A. Farrell, George MacDonald, Alfred E. Smith, John J. Raskob and the Rev. Edward Roberts Moore, representing Patrick Cardinal Hayes. Left to right, back row: James Donnelly, James Dwyer, Arthur O'Leary, Judge Alfred J. Talley, John P. O'Brien, William T. Fetherston, Martin J. Quigley and George Cook, December 20, 1934. Smith was former New York governor and the 1928 Democratic candidate for president, O'Brien was the former mayor of New York and Quigley was editor of the influential trade weekly *Motion Picture Herald* and co-author of the Production Code. Source: Author's personal archive. 54
- 3.2 Catholic influence ascendant: Bishop John F. O'Hara (left), former president of the University of Notre Dame and Apostolic Delegate for the U.S. Military; Will H. Hays (center), president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America and Jack L. Warner (right), head of production at Warner Bros., at the gala celebration marking the premiere of the Catholic-friendly war film *The Fighting 69th* (1940) in New York, January 24, 1940. Source: Author's personal archive. 56
- 3.3 Condemned by the Legion of Decency, passed by the Production Code Administration: a lascivious Eli Wallach



	puts the moves on Carroll Baker's title nymphet in director Elia Kazan's version of Tennessee William's <i>Baby Doll</i> (1956), a lust-filled melodrama unimaginable in the days of the Breen office. Source: Author's personal archive.	61
4.1	Print advertising of <i>La virgen que forjó una patria</i> ( <i>The Virgin Who Forged a Motherland</i> ). Produced by Films Mundiales. Directed by Julio Bracho. México, 1942). Source: Author's personal archive.	75
5.1	OCIC President Jean Bernard meeting with Pope Pius XII in 1958. Source: SIGNIS.	86
5.2	Influenced by the campaign launched by Jean Bernard and his newspaper, in 1951, Catholics loudly demonstrated against <i>The Sinner</i> . Source: Author's personal archive.	96
7.1	Giulio Andreotti and Father Felix Morlion at Pro Deo (1948). Source: Author's personal archive.	116
7.2	Father Morlion (here with Jean Cocteau) during the Venice Film Festival in 1948. Source: Author's personal archive.	119
7.3 and 7.4	Stills from <i>Francesco giullare di Dio</i> . Source: Author's personal archive.	123
7.5	Poster for <i>Europa '51</i> . Source: Author's personal archive.	126
8.1	Letter from Cardinal Pacelli to Monsignor J.H.G. Jansen, June 17, 1932. Source: Archive of the Archdiocese of Utrecht.	143
8.2	Heinrich George, left, in the first film produced by Eidophon, <i>Das Meer Ruft</i> (1933). Source: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin	149
8.3	The Archbishop of Utrecht, Mgr. Jansen (with glasses) attends the premiere of <i>Das Meer Ruft</i> at the Tuschinski Theater on January 26, 1933. To his right is the bishop of Haarlem, Mgr. Aengenent. Source: Het Leven, Nationaal Archief/Spaarnestad Photo.	149
8.4	A.J. van Domburg (1895–1983). Source: Author's personal archive.	150
9.1	People mourning at Pius XII's funeral. Source: Archivio Rodrigo.	160
9.2	Journalists at Pius XII's funeral. Source: Archivio Rodrigo.	161
11.1	John Charles McQuaid.	191
13.1	Catholic movie theaters in Italy (1963–1975; number and percentage.	223
13.2	Small-gauge movie theaters in Italy (1960–1969).	227
13.3	The moral advices (or recommendations) given by the <i>Centro Cattolico Cinematografico</i> (1950–1959).	230

13.4	The moral advices (or recommendations) given by the <i>Centro Cattolico Cinematografico</i> (1959–1967).	231
14.1	View of the Dorpsstraat in St. Willebrord. On the right Luykx's cinema, in later years renamed Luma (after <i>Luykx</i> and his wife <i>Marijnissen</i> ). Date and photographer: unknown, circa 1950. Source: A.G. de Bruijn/Regionaal Archief West-Brabant.	245
14.2	Picture of St. Willebrord girl in traditional costume, exhibition catalog <i>Nationale Kleederdrachten van Harer Majesteits onderdanen</i> (1898). Photographer: H.W.J. Bickhoff. Source: Nederlands Openluchtmuseum Arnhem.	247
15.1	Devotional picture "Crusade for the Motion Picture's Moral Improvement, sought by Pope Pius XI" (probably 1937). This picture was spread all over the Flemish Catholic community and contained a film pledge, clearly inspired by the American Legion of Decency's example. In the pledge, references are made to <i>Vigilanti cura</i> , the actions by the Catholic Film League and the Catholic Film Control Board. Source: Author's personal archive.	259
15.2	Father Felix Morlion (back) on the set of <i>De Witte</i> ( <i>Whitey</i> , 1934), talking to the popular Flemish writer Ernest Claes, film director Jan Vanderheyden and composer Renaat Veremans. Although Catholics were quite unsuccessful in film productions, they tried to influence local popular film productions like this one, which was on of the first Flemish talkies. Source: Archief Ernest Claesgenootschap.	260
16.1	Map showing the distribution of commercial and parish cinemas in Rome (map design: Elisa Ravazzoli, 2014).	276

## TABLES

13.1	Catholic film theaters divided by main geographical areas (1966).	224
15.1	The number and share of pillarized film venues in a sample of Flemish cities (n = 64).	262

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# Acknowledgments

The chapters in this volume constitute a selection of papers presented at the international conference *Catholics and Cinema: Productions, Policies, Power* held in Oxford, UK, in September 2011. Although the conference and this volume are part of the growing interest in the interrelationship between cinema and religion, we tried to bring forward more critical questions which went beyond the representation of religious myths, themes or figures in movies. The key idea of the conference was that an overwhelming majority of scholarly work in the field concentrates on religion *in* cinema, or on the religious experience of film (cinema *as* religion), while harder, more mundane questions on the power, policies and practices of religious organizations in the cinematic sphere (religion *behind* cinema) are rarely grasped by the root.

For reasons concerned with our own cultural background and research interests, we decided to focus upon Catholicism and on the overarching structure behind it, the Roman Catholic Church. As one of the oldest and most powerful religious institutions in the world, the Roman Catholic Church has heavily influenced Western and ultimately world histories. In seeking to evangelize the world, the Church has a long history of actively propagating its moral worldview through concrete yet mundane strategies. While the diverse influences of Catholicism continue to attract scholarly attention, the Church's reactions to, and engagement with, cinema are still under-researched.

Originally conceived as an exploration rather than an inventory of existing research on these issues, the conference turned out to be a blessing for underscoring the many unexpected and unexplored dimensions in this field. We were thrilled by the wide spectrum of the Church's actions, tactics and strategies, as well as being amazed by the similarities, varieties and differences within the Catholic world on topics dealing with film policies, production, marketing, promotion, censorship, criticism, reception or audiences' cinema-going experiences.

The editors would like to thank all participants and, in particular, keynote speaker Thomas Doherty for contributing to the success of the conference. We are very much indebted to all those who helped organize this

two-day meeting, in particular colleagues at Oxford Brookes University and at the Centre for Cinema and Media Studies (CIMS) at Ghent University. We should also thank the authors for their patience and for readily revising and updating their original contributions. Our gratitude also goes to Nancy Chen, Denise File and Felisa Salvago-Keyes at Routledge. The editors thank Lennart Soberon for his excellent work in compiling the index. A final and very special thanks goes to Robert Hensley-King, whose multiple life experiences, including those in the catacombs of the Church, forcefully helped improve the quality of the contributions.

Daniel Biltereyst and Daniela Treveri Gennari

# Catholics, Cinema and Power

## An Introduction

*Daniel Biltereyst and Daniela Treveri Gennari*

“You sit at the valve in the conduit through which flows the principal amusement of the great majority of all the people in the world. Your impress is upon the quality of this entertainment and you are very important to us. We are deeply interested, of course, in the success of your efforts.”

(Pope Pius XI to Will H. Hays, Rome, November 17, 1936)<sup>1</sup>

In *The Memoirs of Will H. Hays*, published in 1955, the first president of Hollywood’s powerful trade organization Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) devoted several pages to his nine-day stay in “the cradle of all arts,” Rome, in November 1936. After writing about his meeting with ‘Il Duce’ Benito Mussolini, Will Hays recounted another significant experience of his commercial-diplomatic trip to Europe, namely his private audience with the “spiritually and mentally vigorous” Pope Pius XI.<sup>2</sup> Hays was a guest of the Vatican, so the pope opened the conversation “in order that we might express to you the appreciation of the Church for the improvement in the moral content of American motion pictures.”<sup>3</sup>

International newspapers paid considerable attention to Hays’ visit to the Vatican, but few explored what this meeting could mean for the future of cinema in and beyond the Catholic world. In addition to strengthening the ties between Hollywood and the Holy See, the meeting consolidated the Vatican’s evolving film policy, as officially promulgated a mere four months earlier in the Papal Letter *Vigilanti cura* (June 29, 1936). In this landmark Encyclical, the first completely devoted to the ‘film problem,’ the pope paid particular tribute to the work of the Legion of Decency, the influential American Catholic pressure group “launched more than two years ago as a holy crusade against the abuses of the motion pictures.”<sup>4</sup> During the interview that lasted nearly an hour, the leader of the global Roman Catholic Church and Hays discussed the Legion’s progress and the extent to which its moral crusade during 1933–1934 had encouraged the studios to introduce the Production Code Administration (PCA) in June 1934. The Holy Father

must have been pleased with the news that by mid-July the Irish-American Catholic Joseph I. Breen had formally taken charge of the PCA,<sup>5</sup> the American film industry's self-regulatory body that would become central in safeguarding moral standards for movie scripts, behavior and representations in Hollywood pictures for the next few decades (see Chapter 3).

Given Hollywood's world dominance in the film entertainment business, the Vatican regarded the situation in the United States as crucial for its film policy. Hays' memoirs remain silent about whether the two men also talked about what happened elsewhere, but it was clear that the Vatican had highly ambitious plans. Although the Encyclical is often seen as the Vatican's salute to the Legion of Decency's glorious victories in the United States,<sup>6</sup> Pope Pius XI's letter explicitly called upon the "bishops of all countries" to support the work of all those who had accomplished with a "painstaking vigilance (. . .) a great work for the protection of the morality of their people in their hours of leisure and recreation."<sup>7</sup> *Vigilanti cura* also makes clear the Vatican's position that its engagement with film should not be restricted to the production of Hollywood movies, as discussed with the MPPDA's chief. The central objective of moralizing cinema could only be achieved by acting in other areas of film, including production, trade, exhibition and the audience experiences of motion pictures.

To a great extent, *Vigilanti cura* can be regarded as the pope's post factum approval of the practices already begun in the Catholic world in relation to cinema, as well as an explicit encouragement of Catholics involved in the crusade against immoral pictures. Ever since the emergence of the medium that was for a long time considered by the Church a 'sinful' product of modernity, Catholics had been ambivalent towards cinema. In 1927, more than thirty years after the medium's birth, in a book on Catholicism and the 'film problem' (*Les Catholiques et le Problème du Cinéma*), the Belgian canon Abel Brohée still characterized cinema as a "school of paganism" and "immorality," as a "promoter of adultery," "greed," "evil passions," "free love" and as an "auxiliary of Socialism."<sup>8</sup> At the same time, however, Father Brohée, who would become one of the prominent leaders of the international Catholic film movement in the 1930s and 1940s (see Chapter 1), argued that Catholics could no longer commit the "grave sin of omission" and that they should strengthen their "crusade" against sinful cinemas.<sup>9</sup> At that time, Catholics had already undertaken a wide variety of initiatives in their attempts to enter the arena of the pictures—not only in the United States, but, as this volume will make clear, also in Europe and elsewhere. In countries such as Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, local Catholics had tried to produce, distribute and exhibit movies, while they also took initiatives in the fields of film censorship, information, criticism and audiences' access to particular movies or cinemas.<sup>10</sup> In 1928, Catholics from mainly European countries established an international organization, the International Catholic Office for Cinema (*Organisation Catholique Internationale du Cinéma*, OCIC, see Chapter 1),

in order to strengthen and coordinate their actions. In the following years, while national Catholic film organizations further developed their strategies (see various chapters in this book), the Vatican became more active in cautiously addressing the film problem, promulgating its film policy in subsequent Papal Letters and in its support for the Catholic laity, priests and other local church leaders.<sup>11</sup> In the meantime, while closely following and supporting the Legion of Decency's offensive actions, OCIC further developed by organizing international conferences, supporting workshops and establishing its headquarters in Brussels under Canon Brohée's proficient presidency (1933). In April 1934, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the Vatican's secretary of state and the future Pope Pius XII, wrote a letter on the 'Pope and the Film Problem'—a letter not only officially recognizing OCIC, but also now firmly supporting a more belligerent policy towards the film problem, because "it should make the most ardent zealot of those who, in the spirit of the Catholic Action, have in various countries dedicated themselves to a meritorious apostolate for religious and social elevation."<sup>12</sup>

So when *Vigilanti cura* was pronounced, and by the time Hays came to the Vatican in order to consolidate the close ties between Hollywood and the Catholic world, much of the groundwork had already been done, not only in the United States, but also to some extent, and probably more, elsewhere. In fact, as John Trumbour wrote in his *Selling Hollywood to the World*, "in contrast to those in the United States, European Catholics had succeeded in creating an extensive exhibition circuit, particularly in Belgium, France, Germany and Italy."<sup>13</sup> While "the U.S. industry under oligopoly conditions proved more easily threatened by the prospects of a massive Legion theatre boycott," European Catholics in many countries had to deal with the lack of a stable film production industry, in which "independent companies created single pictures and then routinely folded."<sup>14</sup> Given the high cost of religiously inspired film production, European Catholics had a keen eye on influencing cinemas and film culture in other directions, from public protests and silent boycotts to structural interventions in the film exhibition sector (e.g., starting cinemas, creating networks of Catholic-inspired film theaters), establishing control boards, launching film journals and so on.

This brings us to the central aim of this volume. While, in the words of Richard Maltby, Hollywood's "defensive alliance with the Catholic Church"<sup>15</sup> has been profoundly studied,<sup>16</sup> little literature is available on the relationship between Catholics and cinema elsewhere, at least for English-language readers. One of the purposes of this collection is precisely to bring into perspective much of this scholarly work about Catholics' involvement with cinema. In countries where Catholicism was long established as the dominant religion in society, there is a renewed interest in exploring the breadth of policies, strategies and tactics developed by Catholic organizations in the field of film as popular entertainment. In countries such as Argentina (Chapter 12),<sup>17</sup> Belgium (Chapter 15),<sup>18</sup> France (Chapter 6),<sup>19</sup> Germany,<sup>20</sup> Luxembourg (Chapter 5), Mexico (Chapter 4), Spain,<sup>21</sup> Switzerland,<sup>22</sup> the



Netherlands (Chapter 14)<sup>23</sup> and obviously in Italy, the homeland to the Holy See (Chapters 2, 9, 10, 13, 16),<sup>24</sup> scholars have recently conducted groundbreaking doctoral research in these areas. Unfortunately, access to most of this work is restricted to those who can read the scholars' native languages.

## RELIGION, NEW CINEMA HISTORY AND THE INSTITUTIONAL TURN

This book is situated at the crossroads of film and religion, a topic that in recent decades has become a rapidly expanding interdisciplinary field of research. This growth is best illustrated by an unbroken stream of publications, including monographs,<sup>25</sup> edited volumes,<sup>26</sup> encyclopedias, handbooks and companions,<sup>27</sup> as well as dedicated specialized journals and journal issues.<sup>28</sup> This current volume intends to offer something different to most of the aforementioned texts. Contrary to most other edited books and monographs on film and religion, this volume does not focus on the analysis of religious messages as presented in particular types of film, nor does it tackle the fidelity question in movies related to the cinematic representation of biblical figures or religious themes. The contributions do not examine the ways in which movies or film directors interact with ideas of the sacred, ritual and myth, nor do they investigate the analogies between the experience of cinema and religion.<sup>29</sup>

The key idea of the volume is that an overwhelming majority of scholarly work in the field, mostly originating from religious studies, concentrates on issues of the portrayal and representation of religious symbols, themes, personae, stories and myths in movies (cf. religion *in* cinema) or on the religious experience of film (cinema *as* religion), while harder, more mundane questions on the power, policies and practices of religious organizations in the cinematic sphere are rarely grasped by the root. We believe that this book explores an unjustifiably neglected domain at the nexus of cinema and religion, namely the one dealing with the question of how religious organizations and their representatives make use of the film medium and try to influence the business which operates it (cf. religion *behind* cinema). Rather than focusing on films, representation and the intrinsic cinematic experience, the volume focuses on religion as a societal institution in the cinematic sphere, or as a force behind cinema. Moreover, this volume concentrates on the cinema-related actions, strategies and policies developed by one of the oldest, most powerful and continuously surviving religious institutions in the world, the Roman Catholic Church.

A recurrent issue running through most of the contributions in this book is the one related to the tension between religion and the film entertainment business—more precisely, the multifaceted character of Catholic film policies vis-à-vis the commercial world of cinema. It is about the fascinating encounter between two different spheres of interest which, viewed from

afar, have very little in common. While the film business is often regarded as highly commercialized and characterized by a search for quick success and huge financial profits on the basis of unique selling products, the Church's core business is considered to be about spirituality and personal and societal values in order to build a sustainable world order according to its faith and doxa. However, film and religion, and Catholicism in particular, meet at several crucial points. Obviously, both spheres act as powerful institutions of representation, dealing with values, stories and imagery to be directed at both the individual and the mass audience. Film and religion are analogous, S. Brent Plate argued, "due to their activities of taking the world-as-it-is, and inventing a new world through the dual processes of 'framing' and 'projecting,'"<sup>30</sup> On a more mundane level, both spheres have a long tradition of actively propagating and materializing myths and imagery for commercial or for religious-ideological reasons. Another point of resemblance is that the two institutions are characterized by an ambivalent organizational structure, at least when comparing the Roman Catholic Church and Hollywood. During their heydays in the twentieth century, both the Vatican and the MPPDA were authoritatively located at the hierarchical top of their spheres, enjoying a quasi-absolute power over all other organizations within their range of influence. However, this strongly hierarchical structure went hand in hand with a high degree of decentralization. For instance, the Church (with a capital C)<sup>31</sup> was a notoriously complex institution with an almost inextricable tangle of orders and other related organizations, and with major differences at regional and national levels. Hence, the contributions to this volume will indicate that it is difficult to talk about a clear-cut, one-directional film policy and strategy across the Catholic world, due obviously to shifts over time and differences in the local film market, language, economic or political dynamics.

This volume is, for various reasons, part of a wider attempt to write another film history than the one focusing upon (feature) films and a film industry solely specializing in mass entertainment. Obviously, the volume has close links with the growing interest in the use of the film medium by noncinematic institutions, including libraries, museums, schools and, in this case, religious organizations. The contributions indicate how priests, the laity and other nonfilm professionals linked to the Church were involved in film production and distribution and how they used the medium in venues such as community and parish halls for entertainment, as well as for educational and other purposes. In addition to this strand of research on *useful cinema*,<sup>32</sup> various contributions to this volume are part of what has recently become known as *new cinema history* and its attempt to look beyond the movie-as-text.<sup>33</sup> In criticizing mainstream film historiography for centralizing movies, new cinema history proposes to abandon the preoccupations with the film text, and with the medium specificity, to look at cinema as a social and cultural institution.<sup>34</sup> One of the premises of the new cinema history perspective is not only to decentralize the film text and the film

medium, but also to do the same with the film industry as the core institution of investigation. It is a plea to arrive at more productive interdisciplinary dialogues between film/cinema studies and broader cultural and social historiographies. The case studies in this volume illustrate how religious organizations, which have in principle, one might argue, little or nothing to do with the film business, have developed concrete actions in this field to become an important player in one or more of the fields in the movie business. This process not only involved strategies and activities developed by the Church and the film industry, but also players from other societal arenas, such as Catholic-inspired trade unions, women's and parents' organizations and political parties (see Chapter 14). A case in point is post-war Italy, where a number of efforts were made to moralize cinema. The expansion of parish cinemas during the post-war period enabled Catholic venues to become a significant and powerful presence in the exhibition market (Chapter 15).<sup>35</sup> Also during this period, Italian clergy tried to influence film production and the emergence of the neorealist tendency (Chapters 2 and 10). Likewise during the post-war years, Italian film policies were strongly influenced by politicians with close links to the Catholic film movement (Chapter 10).

This focus upon religion and cinema as two interrelated, interactive and, at times, competitive societal and cultural institutions generates increasing interest in the role of institutions within media and cultural studies.<sup>36</sup> Looking at the interplay of religion, cinema and other social institutions from this perspective is interesting. From a sociological point of view, institutions are regarded as complex social forms that reproduce themselves and include, as argued by Jonathan Turner, "a complex of positions, roles, norms and values lodged in particular types of social structures and organising relatively stable patterns of human activity with respect to fundamental problems in producing life-sustaining resources, in reproducing individuals, and in sustaining viable societal structures within a given environment."<sup>37</sup> These characteristics of (re)producing (a discourse on) roles, norms and values with the aim of stabilizing human activity are crucial in understanding the complexities of Catholicism and the predominant organization controlling it. As the predominant force, the Roman Catholic Church can be understood as a meta-institution with the power to influence and organize other related institutions like trade unions and political parties. A key question in this volume is, obviously, to reflect upon the power of this meta-institute to impose its rules, along with the examination of cross-institutional alliances and/or conflicts. Particularly interesting here is the work by the Greek-French critical philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, who tried to think about social institutions more creatively without falling into a determinist position.<sup>38</sup> Castoriadis' work on institutions and social imaginaries is useful in re-examining the often-skeptical distance towards, or even dark visions about, institutional power within Marxist thinking. The recent tendency towards an emerging institutional turn within cultural studies and "other

areas of inquiry concerned today with power, subjectivity, identity, desire and the force of social imaginaries” is, as Meaghan Morris and Mette Hjort recently argued,<sup>39</sup> a plea for going beyond visions of subjection and the “potentially negative productivity of institutional life.”

Castoriadis’ ideas are particularly useful for critically examining religion as a social institution. Within his political and philosophical project, Castoriadis regarded institutions as being created by society itself through social imaginary, often on the basis of some ‘stronger’ foundations or extra-social sources like God, nature or reason, upon whose authority laws are adopted, which define the institution’s norms, customs and practices. Social institutions are continuously instituted and instituting, Castoriadis claims, as well as they are “created and recreated as their members perform the roles, actions and practices which define this institution.”<sup>40</sup> In his commentary on social institutions and heteronomy, Karl E. Smith argues that for Castoriadis, religion was the “most pervasive mode of heteronomy in human history,” and that he treated religion “as nothing more than or other than social institution” where we “find every form of human cruelty and injustice somewhere sanctioned and justified on the grounds of it being the will of some god or another.”<sup>41</sup> Castoriadis argues that “like all religions, it is centered around an imaginary. And as a religion, it must establish rites; as an institution, it must surround itself with sanctions.”<sup>42</sup> However, Castoriadis’s thinking also offers space for a critical reflection on institutional power and human autonomy. He considers institutions as profoundly human-made and “identity” seeking constructions, which can be questioned. Each such institution falls victim to its own inertia, causes alienation or outstrips its function and its “reasons for existing.”<sup>43</sup>

## THE CHURCH’S HEGEMONY, POLITICAL CATHOLICISM AND CINEMA

Returning to this volume, we think that the contributions offer ample examples of how the Roman Catholic Church in its encounters with cinema has been a complex, powerful, yet not infallible social meta-institution. In attempting to moralize cinema, it had the power to develop multifaceted film policies and strategies by mobilizing clergy and other Church representatives. Moreover, it succeeded in engaging a large ensemble of other influential social institutions linked to its beliefs. This question on the Church’s ability to engage other organizations and institutions in its film policy cannot be separated from the moral hegemony it enjoyed during a large part of the twentieth century in many parts of the world. It touches on the issue of to what degree the Church’s beliefs and moral standards were hegemonic to a point that they influenced society and its major institutions. The example of political Catholicism is important here, given the historical-political role played by political parties, either wholly or partly Catholic

inspired in many societies. In Europe, Catholic parties first emerged during the last decades of the nineteenth century, but after the First World War, they became a major force. In European democracies such as Belgium and the Netherlands, or in post-war Germany and Italy, Christian democratic parties enjoyed both electoral success and almost uninterrupted political power, even up to today. Although the situation was more complicated in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the Church and Catholic political movements flourished in authoritarian regimes such as António Salazar's Portugal, Francisco Franco's Spain and Engelbert Dollfuss's Austria, which were undoubtedly inspired by Catholic beliefs. Martin Conway, in his introduction to a book on political Catholicism in Europe, writes that although the "Church rarely played a pre-eminent role in the creation and development of these political parties," it had been crucial in the upsurge in the Catholic political movement. A crucial figure was Pope Pius XI, as mentioned earlier, who was elected in 1922 and was determined that "Catholicism should play a more militant role in the modern world."<sup>44</sup> The centerpiece of this more belligerent movement was the Catholic Action movement (Chapter 1), a term referring to the more active engagement of the Catholic laity "under the leadership of the clergy to bring about a re-catholicization of modern life."<sup>45</sup> This Catholic Action movement had already been launched before Pope Pius XI, but now turned into a mass-mobilized ethical *reconquista*, or Catholic renaissance, acting against the forces of modernity and immorality. During the inter-war period, this new religious militancy and spiritual radicalism soon turned its aegis against the symbols of modernity, i.e., mass media and cinema in particular.

The case studies in this volume illustrate that the impact of Catholic film policies to a large extent depends on the militancy of local militant groups and the creativity of particular film leaders, as well as on the support of other organizations operating within the same Catholic hemisphere. In post-war Belgium and Italy, for instance, where the Catholic Action movement was strong, well organized and supported by other Catholic institutions and organizations, the Church's film policy turned out to be quite successful. Elsewhere, under regimes such as Franco's "Catholic" Spain, clergy were appointed to official censorship boards and given the authority to censor films in the name of both Church and state.<sup>46</sup> The complexities and efficiencies of the Catholics' encounter with cinema can only be understood when the varying alliances between the Church, the local/national Catholic film movement and the engagement of other institutions working within the meta-institution's hegemony are taken into account. This helps explain another aspect in the similarities and differences in the Church's film policy, namely the different processes of manufacturing and experiencing films in which Catholics were engaged.

As editors of this volume, we chose to structure the chapters around some of these processes. The volume is divided into five parts, each of which deals with a significant level of engagement with cinema. The first part deals

with the issue of film policies as these were developed in, by or around the Church and Catholic film organizations. This first section looks at Catholic film organizations and their institutional power, policies and strategies. The volume opens with a chapter on international Catholic film policy and diplomacy. In his contribution, Guido Convents, one of the leading historians on this topic, tells the detailed story of the growth of the international Catholic film organization after the First World War, which ultimately led to the emergence of the OCIC in 1928. The following three chapters concentrate on Catholic film policies in three major film production countries. In his chapter on Italy, the prominent Italian film historian Dario Edoardo Viganò discusses the relationship between the Italian Church and cinema after the Second World War. Although the Church had always been ambivalent towards cinema, Viganò explains how Italian Catholics developed a wide range of initiatives and activities in the field of cinema. Illustrating this 'double pedagogy,' the author expands on activities in the field of film exhibition, as well as on Catholics' engagement with film productions like Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960). The next chapter focuses on American Catholics and their engagement with Hollywood. Thomas Doherty, the author of several seminal studies on Hollywood and censorship (including a cultural history of the PCA and a biography of Joseph I. Breen),<sup>47</sup> tells the fascinating story of "the progress of an outcast minority into the center stage of American life." The chapter is constructed as a three-act scenario, starting with the Catholics' struggle for control, their imperial hegemony and finally their gradual decline from the 1960s onwards. The final chapter in this part addresses the interesting history of Catholics' involvement in cinema in Mexico. In his contribution, Francisco Peredo Castro concentrates on the strategies developed by some key organizations, including the Mexican Legion of Decency and the Mexican Catholic Action, founded in 1929. Peredo Castro makes a particularly significant link between the Mexican state film policies, Catholics and the relationship with their US counterparts.

The next part is a deeper exploration of the more practical workings of Catholic film institutions, which focuses on particular figures or key persons. With regard to institutions, theoretical sociologists such as Rom Harré argue that an institution should be "defined as an interlocking double-structure of persons-as-role-holders or office-bearers and the like, and of social practices involving both expressive and practical aims and outcomes."<sup>48</sup> Underlining the importance of individual leaders' strategic creativity and organizational capacities, the chapters in this part highlight Catholic film leaders, who are now often forgotten in mainstream film historiography. Paul Lesch highlights the significance of Father Jean Bernard from Luxembourg, who, after working as the assistant to Canon Brohée, was elected the OCIC's president in 1947 and became one of the main forces behind the international Catholic film movement. Describing his unwavering commitment and his language and organizational skills, Lesch also expands on Bernard's important

role and ideas as a film critic and animator in the Grand Duchy. In her chapter on France, Mélisande Leventopoulos analyzes the key role played by a Jesuit priest, Father Emmanuel Flipo SJ, in the construction of a Catholic film policy between 1945 and 1962. A particularly fascinating aspect of this chapter is Flipo's difficult relationship with the French Church's hierarchy, along with his policy of cultivating an intense dialogue with film professionals. The next chapter, written by Elena Dagrada, focuses upon one of the most mysterious yet fascinating figures within the international Catholic film movement, the Belgian Dominican Father Felix Morlion. Morlion was a major figure in the development and organization of the Catholic Film Action in Belgium before the Second World War (Chapter 15), and afterwards became a key figure in the Vatican's film policies in Italy. In her captivating contribution, Dagrada highlights Morlion's creative collaboration with Roberto Rossellini in an attempt to create a Catholic version of the internationally acclaimed neorealist tendency.

The third section of the book deals with another area of research in film history not yet fully explored, namely, the Catholics' engagement with film production and technology. In the first chapter, Karel Dibbets examines the fascinating yet unsuccessful story of Catholics' engagements with the development of new sound technologies in the Netherlands. In his contribution, Dibbets explains how the International Eidophon company, founded in Amsterdam in 1931, was the Church's most ambitious attempt at launching the production of Catholic films for the international market. Dibbets underlines how this project was the result of an alliance between Dutch Catholics and the Vatican on the one hand, and on the other, major private companies and figures like the multimillionaire Bernard Joseph Brenninkmeyer, who co-owned the well-known Dutch clothing company C&A. The next chapter shifts to post-war Italy and concentrates on an important yet disregarded aspect in mainstream Church historiography, namely the role of cinema and television in disseminating the pope's public image. In his chapter, Federico Ruozzi focuses upon the Vatican's audiovisual policy in relation to the construction of Pope Pius XII during the 1940s and 1950s. Drawing upon several concrete case studies and elaborating on the idea of the mediated construction of cult personalities, Ruozzi underlines the importance of cinema, television and the mass media in general to disseminate the pope's image all over the world. The final contribution in this part on film production further elaborates the attempts by the Vatican and Italian Catholics to develop a Catholic neorealism. Particularly interesting in this chapter by Tomaso Subini is the alliance between Father Morlion, film director Rossellini and Giulio Andreotti, who was once Morlion's personal assistant and became one of the most emblematic and powerful Italian politicians. Before becoming Italy's prime minister, Andreotti was undersecretary to the presidency of the Council of Ministers responsible for government intervention in the film industry between 1947 and 1953. Drawing upon several intriguing case studies, Subini argues that while the Italian Catholic film movement

was strong at various levels (see other chapters), the project to create a Catholic version of neorealism failed.

The next part deals with issues of film control and censorship, and opens with Kevin Rockett's chapter on Ireland. Having achieved state censorship restrictions on imported films following Irish independence in 1922, Catholic Church activists adopted *Vigilanti cura* as their frame of reference while establishing the National Film Institute of Ireland. Rockett tells the story of this film institute, highlighting how from the 1960s onwards, it became increasingly marginalized and was swept away during the 1980s. In her chapter on the alliance between Catholics and the state, Maria Elena de las Carreras explains how the Catholic laity managed film censorship in Argentina from the 1960s to the 1980s. Applying traditional moral and religious criteria enacted by the military regime, this federal board lasted until the return to the constitutional order in 1983. The chapter examines the *entente cordiale* between the military regimes and the Catholic hierarchy, which exerted control over films prior to their theatrical release, and the Catholic faithful involved in the process. In her essay on post-war Italy, Mariagrazia Fanchi illustrates how the Catholic Church was marked by the tension between the willingness to promote cinema and the need to exercise control over it through the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico* (CCC). Starting from Pope Pius XII's 1955 speeches on cinema (*Discorsi sul film ideale*, Discourses on Ideal Film), Fanchi's contribution elaborates on the CCC's shifting policies. The chapter also examines the consequences of the Catholic film policy for the overall Italian media system.

The last part, on film exhibition, audiences and cinema-going experiences, concentrates on the attempts made by Catholic film organizations in the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy to influence film exhibition, programming and the film culture as experienced by audiences. This final part opens with a Dutch case study by Thunnis Van Oort, who concentrates on issues of the film venue as a social space, gender and religion. The chapter offers an overview of the development of Dutch Catholic policies regarding film exhibition and the establishment of a censorship apparatus, which turned out to be the most tangible accomplishment of Catholic film policy. Van Oort then elaborates on a case study located in the small town of Rucphen where the local city council decreed the separation of seats for male and female audience members in the local cinema. The next chapter, by Daniel Biltreyst, concentrates on the attempts by Catholic film organizations to influence film exhibition and programming in Belgium from the 1930s until the 1960s. The Belgian case is interesting because local Catholics were quite successful in developing an extensive exhibition circuit. In his contribution, Biltreyst also brings in questions of structural control and attempts to create a segregated viewing pattern set against issues of audiences' experiences of it. The final chapter in the volume, by Daniela Treveri Gennari, analyzes the profuse compromises in the process of both moralizing cinema and attracting audiences employed by the Italian government in conjunction



with the Vatican. Using oral history methods, Treveri Gennari goes into how the educational role of a parish cinema network was perceived by its actual audiences in the city of Rome.

Collectively, the essays in this book underline the complexities and variety of film policies, strategies and tactics developed by the Church and Catholic organizations in very different cultural and political environments. This volume does not pretend whatsoever to be an exhaustive examination of the issue. On the contrary, we conceived this volume as an exploration of the many unexpected and unexplored dimensions in the relationship between cinema's history and religious institutions.<sup>49</sup> Concentrating on the Roman Catholic Church, much more work needs to be done, for instance, on the role of Catholics in more recent periods when societies became highly secularized. We hope this volume will inspire further research on this fascinating field, with more work on issues like the Catholics' role in film distribution, marketing, promotion, festivals, criticism and their contribution to the establishment of film theory and film studies itself.<sup>50</sup>

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**Part I**

**Policies**

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# 1 Resisting the Lure of the Modern World

## Catholics, International Politics and the Establishment of the International Catholic Office for Cinema (1918–1928)

*Guido Convents*

Even before the 1920s, cinema was considered by Catholics a powerful popular medium that could influence worldviews and moral values. Many Catholics didn't trust modernity, and cinema was no exception. In fact, they blamed it for the declining influence of religion in society. Modernity didn't simply introduce technological and scientific innovations—it enabled the dissemination of new ideologies, based mostly on atheism and challenging the place of the Church in society.<sup>1</sup> During that time, the pope looked to the Catholic organizations, inspired by Catholic Action (groups of lay Catholics who were attempting to encourage a Catholic influence on society), as a way to counter these new ideas. Likewise, he blamed the media for destroying the 'truth' by propagating these new ideas. In 1905, Pope Pius X made a strong case for Catholic Action in his Encyclical Letter *Il fermo proposito*. In doing so, he not only approved of the activities of lay groups attempting to encourage a Catholic influence on society, but also strongly encouraged more of the laity to become active against the dangers of modernity. Subsequently, from 1908 onward, the Catholic Action movement became active both in and with cinema through its pastoral work in different countries in Europe and the Americas. Likewise, the Catholic Action groups wanted to influence the distribution and the production of films. Some of them published film magazines with age classifications, reviews and articles.<sup>2</sup>

During the First World War, most countries established propaganda services to influence both their populations and those of neutral countries. For the Bolsheviks, for example, film was an ideal propaganda instrument to (re)-educate the masses and to destroy 'religion' in society. Likewise, American Catholics blamed Hollywood for undermining the morals of their communities (Chapter 3). They believed that the cause of the de-Christianization of society was not only the influence of the Socialists, Bolsheviks and Freemasonries, but also of the Jews in Hollywood and in the Soviet Union. Its potential for propaganda ensured that film increasingly became an issue in international politics.<sup>3</sup> It communicated worldviews, which influenced



culture and . . . politics. This was also seen by the new international organization League of Nations. After the war, it was clear to Catholics working in the world of cinema that if they wanted to have a grip on this international phenomenon, they had to unite national efforts and build a common policy.

Having identified a need for a process of international unification of Catholic Action with regard to cinema, this chapter examines the reasons for and developments toward a united policy, and conversely, the reasons for resistance against such a move. Likewise, the chapter will discuss the individuals and the Catholic groups involved with cinema. Furthermore, it explores relevant tensions between secular and religious opinions, as well as the opposing viewpoints within each stance. In doing so, this chapter will revisit the challenged and challenging intersections between Catholicism, modernity and cinema through a historical contextualization of the work of the League of Nations and the various Catholic movements that respectively evolved to become the United Nations and, in the case of the Catholic groups, evolved and combined to create the World Catholic Association for Communication (SIGNIS).<sup>4</sup>

## THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS, CHRISTIAN EUROPE AND CINEMA

During the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the League of Nations was established in Geneva. The objective was to prevent another world war and to maintain peace through diplomacy. Its members were not only representatives of national governments, but also of international organizations. One of these was the Catholic Union of International Studies, created by Georges de Montenach (1862–1925) in 1918, which represented all existing international Catholic organizations.<sup>5</sup> Its aim was to defend a united Christian Europe. Among the initiative-taking personalities supported by the Vatican were the Swiss Baron Gonzague de Reynold (1890–1970) and his cousin Georges de Montenach, and the Spanish Don Pedro Sangro y Ros Olano.<sup>6</sup>

In 1922, de Reynold, along with characters such as Marie Curie, Albert Einstein and Henri Bergson, formed a technical committee for culture, the International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation (CICI) at the League of Nations, which later became the Institute of Intellectual Cooperation.<sup>7</sup> This committee studied “the problem of rectifying errors in text books, which were alleged to be a mainspring of racial prejudices.”<sup>8</sup> Its aim was to shape the minds of its members, and was in this sense value orientated. Catholics had the impression that the objective of the committee was to promote the worldwide laity, and therefore thought it essential to be present.<sup>9</sup> Two years later, the Catholic Union of International Studies created a specialized international Catholic committee for the CICI. It was called

the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the Catholic Union, and it was headed by Monsignor Eugène Beaupin from Fribourg.<sup>10</sup> That year, the French professor Julien Luchaire presented a memorandum on cinema and its relation to the intellectual life, which was adopted by the CICI. For him, cinema and other media such as radio were important for the international transmission of knowledge and opinion.<sup>11</sup> Luchaire was the director of the new International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations, and in 1926, he organized an international film congress in Paris. Here he suggested a permanent organization, linked to the League of Nations, to study the development of cinema not simply as an industry and as an art, but also as a tool for education.<sup>12</sup> According to the newspaper of the French Communist Party, *L'Humanité*, the congress was more concerned with the 'material' aspects of cinema, and the art dimension was not even discussed.<sup>13</sup> Catholics such as de Reynold saw the whole setting of this international cinema congress as a complot against Catholics, and they developed a strategy to counter this 'attack.'

De Reynold considered Luchaire an acolyte of the French politicians of the Parti Radical Edouard Herriot (1872–1957) and François Albert (1877–1933), who were Freemasons, were defenders of secularism and were opposed to diplomatic relations with the Vatican and the existence of Catholic associations. During this period, they also organized Offices du cinéma éducateur (offices of educational cinema) all over France, which could be an argument for establishing an international organization for educational cinema in France. Catholics saw the educational film service, organized exclusively by the state, as an aggression against them. These films, selected without thought for Catholic values, could affect Catholic schools as well.<sup>14</sup>

De Reynold saw that the French atheist politicians had united their forces with international Freemasons to ensure that the League of Nations film center was established in Paris. In 1928, in a letter to the nuncio of Paris, Monsignor Luigi Maglione, he wrote:

This project aimed at nothing less than adding to the Institute for International Cooperation an institute for educational film. Indeed, the congress of 1926 resulted in (the founding of) the International Committee for Education and Social Welfare.<sup>15</sup>

This new International Committee for Educational and Social Welfare (ICESW) was headed by the Belgian secretary general of the League of Red Cross Associations, René Sand, who was a Freemason. According to de Reynold's letter to the Vatican, he and other Catholics did everything they could to obstruct the commission and get it out of Paris. This happened when Gottlieb Imhof, the Swiss president of the Basel Educational Film Office, became president at the Paris congress of a commission that had to deal with the issues of educational film.<sup>16</sup> Then, in 1927, Imhof organized the first Conférence Européenne du Film d'Enseignement (European conference for the pedagogical

film) in Basel. Imhof was a Freemason, which made it undoubtedly easier for the French to accept this. It is probable that the Swiss sought to bring such an international institute for educational cinema to Switzerland. De Reynold appeared to have had confidence in him.<sup>17</sup> Imhof wanted to have a 'chambre internationale du film d'enseignement' (international chamber of the educational film), which would look to the technical aspects of educational cinema. It was clear to de Reynold that the Catholics, active in cinema, had to unite their forces in order to prevent the domination of anticlerical and antireligious groups in such an international chamber, which operated under the auspices of the League of Nations. So in this context, he was striving for an international Catholic organization for film to become a member. His ideas were shared by others, with whom he had contact, and had been expressed a year earlier by The International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues (IUCWL).<sup>18</sup> In April 1927, in Basel, de Reynold announced the organization of a Catholic congress on educational cinema.

In Basel, another dynamic was triggered, which had to do with the international Italian politics. Luciano De Feo, the head of the Italian state institute L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa (LUCE) impressed the congress with his experience in the use of cinema as a pedagogical tool. In fact, LUCE was a propaganda instrument for Mussolini's national and international policy. Its vice-president was Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli, head of the cabinet of the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs. LUCE played a part in shaping the mind of the Italian public toward Mussolini's ideology.<sup>19</sup> Thanks to De Feo, and the financial commitment of the Italian state, the International Educational Cinematographic Institute (IECI) was established in Rome in order "to encourage the production, dissemination and exchange of educational films [. . .] to promote international understanding among the world's peoples."<sup>20</sup> A triumphant de Reynold wrote to the Vatican, explaining that the plans of the French Catholic hostile government were torpedoed. The IECI was presided over by Alfredo Rocco, the Italian minister of justice, member of the Commission of Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations and confidant of Mussolini.<sup>21</sup>

In November 1928, the IECI was launched. De Reynold informed the apostolic nuncio Maglione in Paris that Catholics now had an influence in the IECI:

This institute is directed by a board of directors whose members are appointed by the Council of the League of Nations. We managed to ensure the inclusion of several Catholics, including Ms. Mistral, a Chilean, who was very famous in South America as a poet and teacher, Don Pedro Sangro, (and) your servant who is ever more the general reporter.<sup>22</sup>

Of the fifteen members on the board of administration of the institute, de Reynold had at least two Catholic allies. One of the two members, Mistral,

had proved herself by successfully reforming the school system in Mexico, and in 1925, she was chosen to 'represent' Latin America at the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation in Paris.<sup>23</sup>

De Reynold thought that the most important position in the IECI was the technical expert, who was attached to the board of administration, because that person could control the institute. Here he suggested the French canon Joseph Reymond, who was secretary-general of the French Comité Catholique du Cinema. From April 1928 onward, Reymond was also the provisional secretary-general of the new International Catholic Office for Cinema (Organisation Catholique International du Cinéma, OCIC).<sup>24</sup>

If Reymond was nominated, then Catholics such as de Reynold could hit the target, which—using military language—they had spent the last two years fighting to achieve.<sup>25</sup> So, he asked Maglione, who represented the Vatican, to inform Reymond that there were no objections to his accepting the role of expert. Maglione answered that he would accept it without any problems. It is likely that de Reynold wanted the approval of the highest authority in the Church for Reymond. Likewise, he probably hoped to avoid criticism from Catholics about a French priest working as an expert in the institute for a non-Catholic organization.

## **TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC OFFICE FOR CINEMA**

The 1925 Congress of the IUCWL, organized by its Dutch president Mme Florentine Steenberghe-Engeringh in Rome, addressed the dangers threatening the family and consequently society as a whole. 'Cinema' was identified as one of the dangers.<sup>26</sup> It was said that the Catholics did not as yet understand the value of educational cinema, and that most films were produced in Freemasonry studios owned by Jews. As a member of the Catholic Union of International Studies, the IUCWL met de Reynold in 1927 at the first Conference of International Catholic Organizations in Fribourg, where they discussed issues on cinema, education and the politics of the League of Nations. The wife of Baron de Montenach, Suzanne, and Monsignor Beaupin were among those present at the meeting. At its second conference in March 1928, the topics included organizing an international Catholic congress of cinema, the development of an international association of the Catholic press, child protection and the persecution of Catholics in Mexico (Chapter 4).<sup>27</sup> The IUCWL offered to organize an international Catholic congress of cinema at its forthcoming international congress in The Hague in April 1928. Catholics involved in cinema from eighteen countries were invited, and together they formed the OCIC. One of the participants was Maria Christina Giustiniani-Bandini, who was a significant figure in the Italian Catholic women's movement. As a representative of the League of Nations, she worked for Paulucci di Calboli, the then-ambassador to

this international institution, and wrote its first report on cinema for the Committee for the Protection of Children, in which she argued that films could be dangerous for children and affect their morality. Calboli advised his committee to promote 'good' films (documentaries, educational films) and those films that are perceived as 'healthy' entertainment.<sup>28</sup> Starting in 1927, Paulucci di Calboli was undersecretary-general and responsible for both the internal administration and educational cinema at the League of Nations.<sup>29</sup>

The Dutch parliamentarian Antonia (Annie) Meijer wrote in her report for the IUCWL that Catholic women had pleaded for an international Catholic film organization at the congress in Rome. She also added that Catholic women, especially mothers, wanted to be involved with the film appreciation commissions.<sup>30</sup>

The Dutch Dominican priest Hyacinthe Hermans OP, and his secretary Albertus Johannus Rozemeijer, helped Steenberghe-Engeringh. Both men were active in the Catholic Action movement in The Netherlands (Chapters 8 and 14). Hermans, along with Canon Reymond, presided over the congress. According to the Belgian canon Abel Brohée (Chapter 15), they were preoccupied with "building rather than discussing."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in January 1928, the Dutch minister of the interior nominated Hermans and Rozemeijer as members of the central commission of the Dutch state film board of censors. Hermans even became the president of this commission. Consequently, the national cinema law, which was passed two years earlier by the Dutch parliament, was finally applied in March 1928.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Rozemeijer headed the Bureau Catholique International de Propagande pour les Projections Lumineuses dans l'Enseignement (international propaganda office for projections in teaching), which was founded in 1926 in Rotterdam.<sup>33</sup> Addressing people at a congress in The Hague, he spoke about educational films and schools. He had published a booklet on the question of cinema a few days before the congress.<sup>34</sup>

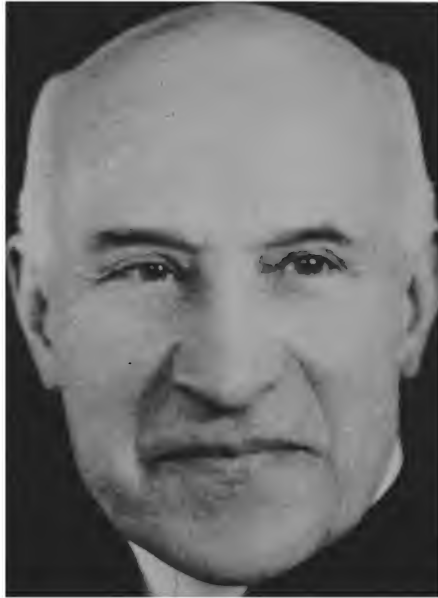
An article published in *L'Observatorio Romano* almost three months before the congress shows that Reymond seemed to have already fixed the outline of the congress and its aims. It also announced that the discussions would address, among other topics, the complex problems concerning cinema production for entertainment, culture and education, and how such an international Catholic film organization had a duty to protect the Catholic flock against evil.<sup>35</sup>

## THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CINEMA CONGRESS IN THE HAGUE

The urgent need for Catholics to be careful with cinema is noted. Film has a profound effect on the moral life of both the individual and on society, but it also affects the parts of society particularly susceptible to

influence of evil. Given that film speaks a common language, it requires action on propaganda at an international level.<sup>36</sup>

The international Catholic cinema congress opened in The Hague on April 23, 1928. One of its slogans was that those who had the schools in their power would have power over the youth, but those who dominated the cinema, dominated the world. In his opening speech, which was in French, Hermans made clear the link with the League of Nations. For Hermans, this international prestigious body had to be considered worthwhile because the Catholic Church, which cares for the spiritual welfare of an entire world, should pay more attention to this new ‘superpower’ called cinema. He stressed that Catholics had previously underestimated the force of it and that now something had to be done about it. Brohée gave an extensive general report on the situation of cinema in the different countries. Hermans also led a part of the congress on Catholic national cinema organizations and international cooperation. He urged the congress to look for a ‘weapon’ to counter the dangers of cinema and called for Catholics worldwide to be made aware of these dangers. Although Brohée was skeptical about the outcome of the congress, he was the one with a clear vision about what an international Catholic organization needed to do. He was appreciated by both the Germans and the French-speaking members.<sup>37</sup>



*Figure 1.1* Canon Abel Brohée, president of the *International Catholic Office for Cinema* (OCIC) from 1933 until 1947.

*Source:* Editor's personal archive.

At the congress, it became clear that Catholics working in the different countries in the field of cinema had little contact with each other. They were now given an international view on the defense of the faith and morals in the field of cinema. The interventions gave a good idea of Catholic Action in relation to film. Hermans discussed the relations between the press and cinema; J. Fröhlings, from the Volkswartbund (People's Protection Alliance) of Cologne,<sup>38</sup> spoke about the leagues of morality and cinema; and Antoine (Annie) Meijer gave an overview of the way in which the Catholic women's leagues were dealing with cinema. The Spanish professor Manuel Villareal y Perez led the session on the protection of children.<sup>39</sup> The Jesuit Father Joseph Dassonville SJ underlined in his paper that Catholics had a role to play in educational cinema. They could leave it to others. Dassonville openly stressed that Catholics should organize themselves internationally to distribute educational film. From the end of the First World War onward, he was active in the movement the Action Populaire (Popular Action). He later became secretary of the French Catholic committee for radio, and the Action Populaire published his brochure on cinema seen as a 'social problem.'<sup>40</sup>

It was the German Dr. Heinrich Wienken, of Caritas Berlin, who wanted specified domains in which the new organization should become active. In the absence of any real Catholic film production, he felt that film review and criticism had to be done. The Catholic appreciation committees should be attentive to films that not only disrespect religion in all its aspects and influence morals in a negative way, but also to those that could endanger the relations between nations and countries or disturb the public order and safety. So he asked openly if there should now be one central review office, or should the reviews be decentralized to the national membership?<sup>41</sup> Another German, Dr. Richard August Keller, an art and church historian who was also a high school teacher in Düsseldorf, asked that the new organization would be concerned with the protection of children and young people from harmful films.<sup>42</sup>

The Polish Jesuit Stanislaus Bednarsky SJ had to introduce the most important part of the meeting, in which the foundation of an international film office would be considered: Canon Reymond spoke about the necessity of having an international Catholic organization for cinema, while the Swiss theologian Alfred Teobaldi, founder of Caritas Swiss, talked about the relationship with philanthropic organizations. The Italian politician and representative for the Italian government at the League of Nations, Stefano Cavazzoni, tackled the issue of relations of such an organism with other international organizations.<sup>43</sup> The director of the film company Lumen in Santiago, Chile, Estanislau Fabrès, described how Catholic films in his country were produced and distributed. Monsignor Beaupin spoke the final words of the congress. A few months later on October 5, 1928, he reported on OCIC at the Congress of the Intellectual Cooperation of the Catholic Union in Warsaw.

At the beginning of the congress, the decision to send a telegram to Pope Pius XI to inform him about the initiative was agreed. It stated that Catholics from different countries were meeting under the presidency of the Archbishop of Utrecht, and they asked the pope to give them his blessing. The Vatican, specifically the Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, was later informed in greater detail about the congress. The apostolic internuncioship in The Netherlands, Monsignor Lorenzo Schioppa, didn't participate at the congress, since, according to him, he had not obtained the approval of the Holy See. Moreover, it was not clear to him what this meeting signified. He knew, however, what was going on because he had celebrated Mass at the international congress of the IUWCL in The Hague, where the cinema congress was also held.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, he had an 'informant' at the congress. This person briefed him and gave him a copy of the printed program of the event. He explained to Schioppa that he had identified two groups. The first was a French-Belgian one with Canons Reymond and Brohée, and the second was the German-speaking group of Fröhling of Cologne and Dr. Georg Ernst from Munich. In the discussion about where the international organization should have its secretariat, the German-speaking group voted for Louvain in Belgium, and according to Schioppa, it was a diplomatic way of explaining to the French that they didn't agree totally with their position. What was the position of the first group? It was to base the secretariat in Paris because the League of Nations already had an established cinema activity there. It could have persuaded the non-German speaking members for this option, though both wanted to have an international organization that would facilitate the contacts between Catholics and the film world, especially with the producers.<sup>45</sup>

The Communist party in France also commented on the foundation of OCIC. Its daily newspaper published that this new international organization was aimed at preventing the production of hate films. It remarked that the OCIC would have its work cut out to obtain such a goal, given that the production had never before been so 'chauvinistic.' *L'Humanité* concluded, in its May 5, 1928, edition, that it was a new 'office' for Catholic and reactionary propaganda.

## THE PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE OF OCIC

At the end of the conference, the international committee had provisionally decided to base its headquarters in Paris, along with a staff. Ernst was elected president and Reymond secretary-general. The project was completed by appointing the following directors: Brohée, Fröhling, the Italian Don Carlo Canziani, the Dutch professor Father Johannes Bemelmans and the Austrian Petrus Rumler. Who, however, were these people?

In 1917, Dr. Ernst founded in Munich the distribution company Leo-Filmgesellschaft for 'Catholic correct' films. It was part of the film action



of the Central of the South German Catholic works' associations. In the early 1920s, Ernst united with different Catholic film producers. It grew to become the most important international Catholic production house, with headquarters in Munich and branches in Vienna, Prague, Innsbruck, Paris and Madrid. Between 1917 and 1925, it produced about seventy-two Catholic films.<sup>46</sup> Brohée, living in Louvain, was one of the pioneers of Catholic Action in Belgium. He had also studied this movement in France and in Germany. At the request of the Belgian cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier, he became active in the Belgian Catholic youth movement from 1909, and he soon included cinema in his pastoral work. In 1920, he started a private distribution film company Brabo, and in 1926, he founded a syndicate of Catholic cinema halls in Belgium called Centrale Catholique du Cinéma/Katholieke Filmcentrale (Chapter 15).<sup>47</sup>

Don Canziani was secretary-general of the Consorzio Utenti Cinematografici Educativi (consortium of the users of educational cinema, CUCE), which in 1926 united all the Catholic initiatives on educational cinema in the diocese of Milan. Its main task was to control and classify films according to the various segments of the audiences in Catholic cinemas. Furthermore, it organized the network of Catholic cinemas and dealt with the distributors. As it expanded rapidly across northern Italy, the CUCE was transformed into the Consorzio per il Cinema Educativo (CCE). In 1928, Canziani founded the *Rivista del Cinematografo* as the magazine of the CCE. The president of the Azione Cattolica Italiana (ACI), Luigi Colombo, asked him a few years later to become a member of the committee for moral cinema of the secretariat for public morality of the ACI. This meant that Canziani's work now became national.<sup>48</sup>

In Austria, around 1910, the choirmaster of Klosterneuburg, Petrus Rumler, had daily screenings in the popular meeting rooms of the Catholic association Volksleshalle (People's Reading Room). His initiative also developed among other Catholic associations in Austria, and parishes integrated cinema in their pastoral work. Then Rumler also established a film distribution service. He wanted to react against the 'dirt and filth in cinema' (brought into cinema by the 'Jews' who were speculating on the 'lowest instincts' of the masses) by promoting the 'good film.'<sup>49</sup> From 1910 onward, Father Johannes Bemelmans became secretary of the association Voor Eer en Deugd (for honor and virtue) that defended morality in The Netherlands. In 1915, he edited the publication *Tooneel en Bioscoop*. It was an information service focused on the decency of films and theater plays destined for young Catholics and families. It was said that he supported in a positive way, as far as possible, 'good' cinema and plays. However, this is not reflected in the publication. In less than a decade, Bemelmans developed international contacts in Belgium, France, Germany and Austria. His organization even became known in Brazil.<sup>50</sup>

After his election as secretary-general of OCIC, Reymond became active at an international level. In December 1928, IECI's committee of experts

had its first meeting in Geneva, and Reymond was present to represent OCIC. Other members included the American Harold L. Smith, who represented the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in Rome, and the German Dr. Hans Cürliis, the director of the Institut für Kulturforschung (the German Institute for Cultural Research), which had a proper department for distributing and producing educational films.<sup>51</sup> In France, the nomination of Reymond as an expert attracted criticism from anti-clericals, such as Émile Glay of the syndicate of non-Catholic teachers, who were also involved in educational cinema.<sup>52</sup> The IECI launched a monthly magazine, the *International Review of Educational Cinematograph*, published simultaneously in Italian, French, Spanish, German and English. It contained not only technical information about educational cinema, but it also published articles and news about religion (albeit mostly from a Catholic perspective) and cinema. Reymond had already published an article on cinema and Catholics in 1928. At the end of October 1928, De Feo contacted the International Federation of Catholic Alumni's Motion Picture Bureau to invite them to contribute to the IREC. He did this after it became known that it had been sending its list of endorsed pictures "to every Cardinal, Archbishop and Bishop in the world."<sup>53</sup>

## EPILOGUE

In general, it can be said that OCIC's provisional board members had solid experience in mobilizing, and that they were in a professional and practical way linked to film criticism, exhibition, distribution and even production. It was established through a mix of laypeople and clergy acting in the light of Catholic Action. Many of them already had some international experience.

The new international Catholic organization (called 'office,' which gave the impression to some that it was part of the Vatican) had a solid base among well-respected Catholics, although the relationship with the Vatican remained difficult. The highest Church authorities were uneasy because they felt that they did not receive sufficient respect from the new organization, in which laypeople were prominent. The tensions started in 1928, when Schioppa, the internuncio in The Hague, heard that the new direction committee of OCIC had discussed whether to send a telegram to the pope. The telegram, which he obviously received, mentioned the presence of the archbishop of Utrecht, Monsignor Hendrik Van de Wettering, at the OCIC congress. As this was 'technically' not the case, and since Schioppa did not trust the congress organizers, he decided not to thank them on behalf of the pope for the telegram. Also, by not thanking the congress, he failed to pass on the pope's blessing. Schioppa had the general impression that the event was not well prepared. Was this a correct observation? It cannot be overlooked that three months before the congress, the Vatican newspaper had published a detailed program of it.<sup>54</sup> The idea was to take more definitive

decisions at the next international congress, which was planned for 1929 in Munich. In 1933, OCIC became an increasingly active organization under the presidency of Belgian Canon Brohée. Brohée was open-minded and he organized film congresses in 1929 and 1930 in Belgium, in which he invited OCIC members from abroad. Although he did everything he could to please the Church authorities, the lack of trust remained. Officially, the Church did not recognize OCIC until its new congress in 1947 in Brussels.

At the level of international diplomacy, the OCIC played its own particular role, albeit not a decisive one, since the IECI of the League of Nations lost its international authority from the early 1930s onward. After the Second World War, OCIC became an active and officially recognized organization by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Council of Europe. This means it could intervene in the discussions and even submit projects. By inviting this Catholic international film organization to create Catholic, and later ecumenical, juries at international film festivals such as Berlin, Cannes or Venice, the international film world acknowledged *de facto* its work. At the end of 2001, OCIC merged with the International Association for Radio and Television (UNDA) to become SIGNIS, which incorporated the aims and activities of both international Catholic media organizations.

## NOTES

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3. Barkhausen, Hans. 1982. *Filmpropaganda für Deutschland im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Hildesheim: Olms Presse, 46. Reeves, Nicolas. 1986. *Official British Film Propaganda during the First World War*. London: Croom Helm/Imperial War Museum, 16–23. Black, Gregory D. 1988. *The Catholic Crusade against the Movies, 1940–1975*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 12. See several chapters in Biltereyst, Daniel and Vande Winkel, Roel, eds. 2013. *Silencing Cinema*. New York: Palgrave.
4. See <http://www.signis.net/>.
5. Goyau, Georges. 1930. "L'Union catholique d'études internationales." *Le Figaro*, 26 November 1930: 1. Georges de Montenach was born in Fribourg where he lived as a wealthy man. He was the cousin of Gonzague de Reynold (1880–1970) and worked all his life in the social Catholic movement on an international level. In 1887, he founded the *International Union of Catholic Students*. He was also co-founder (with his wife Suzanne Galichon, 1867–1957) of the *International Catholic Association of Organizations for the Protection of Girls* and created a number of national and international organizations, like the *Catholic Union of International Studies* in 1918.
6. De Reynold was a correspondent of the illustrated magazine *Echo Illustré* published in Geneva, which was known for its extreme anti-Communist and fascist sympathies. Micheli, Pierre. 1970. "Gonzague de Reynold, fribourgeois,

- suisse, européen. Son activité internationale." *La Liberté*, 25/26 April. Mattioli, Aram. 1994. *Zwischen Demokratie und totalitärer Diktatur: Gonzague de Reynold und die Tradition der autoritären Rechten in der Schweiz*. Zurich: Orell Füssli. Gerber, Adrian. 2010. *Eine gediegene Aufklärung und Führung in dieser Materie: Katholische Filmarbeit in der Schweiz 1908–1972*. Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 135–136.
7. Among the founders of the *Institute of Intellectual Cooperation* in August 1925 were Albert Einstein and Gonzague de Reynold. "Het Parijsche Volkenbondinstituut voor de intellectuele samenwerking." *De Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, 2 August 1925.
8. "The League of Nations: Intellectual Cooperation." *Time*, 10 August 1925.
9. "La coopération intellectuelle internationale." *La Croix*, 17 July 1923.
10. Monsignor Beaupinand de Reynold was asked at the meeting in June 1924 to organize this commission. Among its members were Father Augustino Gemelli, the Franciscan rector of the Catholic University of Milan, and the Jesuit Father Cyril Martindale from Oxford. "L'Union Catholique d'Etudes Internationales et la Coopération intellectuelle." *La Croix*, 18 June 1924.
11. Julien Luchaire was a professor of Italian at the University of Grenoble and he worked at the education department of the French ministry of colonies. He was nominated expert for France to the CICI in 1922 and he worked with Bergson. Luchaire, Julien. 1926. "Le Congrès International du cinéma." *Cinéa*, 15 June 1926. Luchaire, Julien. 1929. "Le monde comme construction intellectuelle." *La Coopération Intellectuelle. Revue mensuelle*, 15 January 1929: 193–196. Luchaire, Julien. 1924. "Le cinématographe dans ses rapports avec la vie intellectuelle." *La Revue de Genève*, October /November 1924: 411–420 and 528–538.
12. One of the decisions was to organize the next international film congress in Berlin, which did not happen. A year later, it was organized in Basel. "Le Congrès International du cinéma." *Cinéa*, 15 October 1926.
13. Moussinac, Léon. 1926. "Les six jours du cinéma." *L'Humanité*, 8 October 1926.
14. Laborderie, Pascale. 2011. "Les offices du cinéma éducateur et l'émergence du parlant; l'exemple de l'office de Nancy." 1895. *Revue d'histoire du cinéma*, nr 64: 34–35. Vial, Gérard. 2003. "De l'Office du cinéma éducateur à la médiathèque." 1895. *Revue d'histoire du cinéma*, nr 41: 127.
15. *Archivio Segreto Vaticano. Nunziatura di Paris*, Rome: file 504, dossier 1148. Letter of de Reynold to the Nuncio in Paris Monsignor Maglione. 1928. Translation by the author.
16. Gertiser, Anita. 2006. "Domestizierung des bewegten Bildes: Von dokumentarischen Film und Lehrmedium." *Montage/av : Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation*, 15 January: 60.
17. Taillibert, Christel. 1999. *L'Institut International du Cinématographe Educatif: Regards sur le rôle du cinéma éducatif dans la politique internationale du fascisme italien*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 61–63.
18. The *International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues* (IUCWL) was founded in Brussels in 1910. It united the leagues from Germany, England, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Spain, France, Lorraine, Portugal, Switzerland and Uruguay.
19. Senator Giuseppe de Michelis acted as the president of LUCE from 1925 to 1933, and then Paulucce di Calboli became president of LUCE. Taillibert, Christel. 1998. "Le cinéma, instrument de politique extérieure du fascisme italien." *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 110, no. 2, 945. Cardillo, Massimo. 1983. *Il duce in moviola. Politica e divismo nei cinegiornali e documentary "Luce."* Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, 161.

20. One of the outcomes of the institute was the foundation of the Venice film festival in 1932. <http://atom.archives.unesco.org/international-educational-cinematographic-institute-iecijisaar>. Taillibert, Christel. "Le cinéma, instrument de politique extérieure du fascisme italien." *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 110, no. 2 (1998): 945.
21. Alfredo Rocco was a professor of economics and a member of Mussolini's national Fascist party. In 1921, he joined the Italian parliament and was minister of justice between 1925 and 1932. There was a vivid correspondence between him and de Reynold. On November 28, 1927, de Reynolds spoke extendedly to Rocco about the problem of cinema and Freemasonry. *Archives littéraires suisses Berne. Correspondance Gonzague de Reynold*, Correspondence Cop.V. copies de lettres 1927.
22. Maglione was nuncio in Paris from June 1926 until mid-1938. Later on, the son of Georges de Montenach, Jean-Daniel, who worked in the early 1920s as a Swiss diplomat at the *League of Nations*, was general-secretary of the *Institute of Intellectual Cooperation* between 1931 and 1939. He was also secretary of the direction committee of the IEIC, with De Feo as director. He had close contact with his uncle, de Reynold. *Archivio Segreto. Nunziatura di Paris*. Rome: Scatola 504, file 1148: Letter of de Reynold to the Nuncio in Paris Monsignor Maglione. 1928.
23. Gabriela Mistral, pseudonym for Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga, got the Nobel Prize for literature in 1945. In the mid-thirties, she wrote on educational cinema for children in *Niño y libro* (1936). In *la Revue Internationale du Cinéma Educateur*, she published in 1929 "Le cinéma documentaire et l'Amérique espagnole" (pp. 261–265). "Mussolini sponsors League Movie Plan. Film fans interested in International Institute established in Rome." *The Emporia Daily Gazette*, 18 December 1928: 5.
24. In getting for Reymond a kind of approval by the Vatican as a Catholic representative in an international secular institute, it probably gave the appearance to the outside world that the relations between the OCIC and the Vatican were normal, but the OCIC didn't receive the blessing of Pope Pius XI in these years. See also Bonneville, Léo. 1998. *Soixante-dix ans au service du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel*. Quebec: Editions Fides.
25. Mistral suggested in 1939 that de Reynold was the person who 'decided' in the *Committee of Intellectual Cooperation*. Mistral, Gabriela and Ocampo, Victoria. 2003. *This America of Ours: The Letters of Gabriela Mistral and Victoria Ocampo*. Austin: University Texas Press, 96–97.
26. Armida Barelli had close contacts with Father Agostino Gemelli, and both were at the founding of the Catholic University of Milan in 1920. *Feuille d'information de l'Union internationale des Ligues Catholiques Féminines*, nr 6. 1924. Arosio, Mario, Cereda, Giuseppe and Iseppi, Franco. 1974. *Cinema e Cattolici in Italia*. Rome: Massimo, 12. Mosconi, Elena. 2006. "Un potente maestro per le fille. Chiesa e mondo cattolico di fronte al cinema." in Ruggero Eugeni and Dario Edoardo Viganò, eds. *Atraverso lo schermo: Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*. Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 165–167.
27. *En Avant; Organe bimensuel de l'association catholique de la jeunesse belge Fémine, supplément à la Fédération*, Brussels, 1 June 1928.
28. Société des Nations. 1926. *La question des Cinématographes. Rapport du marquis Paulucci de Calboli*. Geneva: CPE 21.
29. Sergio, Romano. 2010. "Vita di Paulucci di Calboli dalla diplomazia al cinema." *Corriere della Sera*, 26 March 2010.
30. Information from the biographical archive of the *Parliamentarian Documentation Center* (PDC) of the University of Leiden. <http://www.parlement.com>.

31. Abel Brohée. 1928. "L'urgent problème du cinéma. Les catholiques ne s'intéressent pas assez. Le premier congrès international catholique du cinéma." *Le XXe Siècle*, 1 May 1928: 1.
32. Dibbets, Karel. 1986. "Het bioscoopbedrijf tussen de twee wereldoorlogen." in Karel Dibbets and Frank Van der Maden, eds. *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Film en Bioscoop tot 1940*. Weesp: Wereldvenster, 258–259.
33. At the foundation of these offices for slides, one of the resolutions was to act against the so-called 'Centrale School bioscopen' in The Netherlands and to support the Roman Catholic film archive Immaculatae in Rotterdam. "Het lichtbeeld in het Roomsche Onderwijs," in *Tilburgsche Courant*, Tilburg, 24 March 1926. This bureau had a German section directed by J.F. Weber, an English section directed by F. Saris and a French one directed by A.J. Rozemeijer himself.
34. Rozemeijer, Albertus Johannes. 1928. *De Katholieken en het bioscoopvraagstuk*. Rotterdam: Roomsche-Bureau van international propaganda voor het lichtbeeld in het onderwijs.
35. *L'Osservatore Romano*, Rome, 29 January 1928.
36. *L'Osservatore Romano*, Rome, 29 January 1928. Translation by the author.
37. "Le 1er Congrès catholique international du cinéma." *La Libre Belgique*, 1 May 1928. "Het Internationaal bioscoopcongres." *Het Centrum*, 24 April 1928. *Het Centrum*, Utrecht, 18 January 1925.
38. Fröhling published in the *Volkswart: Monatsschrift zur Pflege der Volkssittlichkeit*, the monthly journal of this association dedicated to fighting public immorality. The Volkswartbund was founded in Cologne in 1898 as a Catholic association of men of Cologne to fight against public immorality, and at that time in particular, against press and literature. It was in the 1920s and 1930s a Catholic 'moral watchdog' for 'mass culture,' and it was an important pressure group towards politicians. In 1927, there was a restructuring, and now the association was administratively affiliated with the Catholic Church and directly submitted to the archbishop of Cologne.
39. Don Manuel Villareal y Perez was the founder of the Catholic weekly *Vida Española*.
40. Dassonville, Joseph. 1930. *Le problème social du cinéma*. Paris: Action populaire, Editions Spes.
41. Since 1925, Caritas produced films by its *Caritas Lichtbildgesellschaft* to promote the idea of caritas. It was one of the largest Catholic film-producing companies in Germany. In 1932, Wienken founded the Katholische Filmarbeitsgemeinschaft Berlin with the intention of looking at censorship and putting cinema at the profit of Catholics. The proposal by the board of this Catholic film association in Berlin to invest in its own production company was rejected because of financial reasons. In July 1921, Wienken had an agreement with Richard Muckermann from the *Stella Maris Filmgesellschaft* (Düsseldorf) and with Georg Ernst from the *Leo-Filmgesellschaft* to build a group of Catholic film producers in Berlin. See Schmitt, Heiner. 1982. *Kirche und Film: Kirchliche Filmarbeit in Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis 1945*. Boppard am Rhein: Harald Bold Verlag, 68. *Revue Internationale du cinéma éducateur*, Rome, October 1932, 911.
42. Information about Dr. Keller from Dr. Benedict Mauer, Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf: mail 23 December 2011.
43. Farrell-Vinay, Giovanna. 1995. "Stefano Cavazzoni." in ed. A. Thomas Lane ed., *Biographical Dictionary of European Labor Leaders*, Westport/London: Greenwood Press, 194–195.
44. "Dal Olanda. Congresso Internazionale delle leghe femminile cattoliche." *Osservatore Romano*, 9 May 1928.

45. "Fra le differenti attività, che si sono studiate per raggiungere la scopo, la principale é stata quelle di sorgere un ente che facility i contatti fra cattolici e produttori." (Translation: "Among the different activities, which were studied to achieve the goal, the main aim has been the one which raised an entity that facilitated the contacts among Catholics and producers.") In the Dutch newspapers like the *Tilburgsche Courant*, this division was also mentioned on April 26, 1928. *Archivio Segreto Vaticano. Segreteria di Stato*, Rome: 1928, file 328, dossier 1.
46. In 1933, the *Leo-Filmgesellschaft* went bankrupt and the process was used by the Nazi press to attack the Catholic Church. Zedler, Jörg. 2010. *Der Heilige Stuhl in den internationalen Beziehungen 1870–1939*. Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 370.
47. A.C.J.B. stands for *Action Catholique de la Jeunesse Belge*. B, L. 1936. "Vingt-cinq années d'action catholique. A propos d'un numéro des publications de l'A.C.J.B." *La Croix*, 5 November 1936: 4.
48. Gili, Jean 1988. "L'Église et le cinéma pendant la période fasciste." in Jean A. Gili, Ralph Schor and Pierre Guira, eds. *Hommes, idées, journaux; mélanges en l'honneur de Pierre Guiral*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 478.
49. Blaschitz, Edith. 2009. *Film und der 'Kampf gegen Schmutz und Schund' Filmrezeption in Österreich zwischen Kontrolle and Identitätsfindung und Bildungsbemühen (1946–1970)*. Vienna: University of Vienna, 87.
50. Van Beusekom, Ansje. 1998. *Film als Kunst. Reacties op een nieuw medium in Nederland, 1895–1940*. Amsterdam: Vrije Pers, 99–100.
51. "A la Société des Nations." *La Revue du Film. Edition Belge des dossiers du cinéma de Paris*, February 1930: 3–4.
52. Albaret, A. 1930. "Anticléricalisme et instituteurs publics: Comment ils ont essayé d'utiliser la radiodiffusion et le cinéma pour combattre la religion," *La Croix*, 19 Novembre 1930: 4.
53. MPPDA Digital Archives, Flinders University, record 626: Circular, 25 October 1929. <http://mppda.flinders.edu.au/>.
54. "Dall'Olanda. Un congresso cattolico sul problema del cinematografo." *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 January 1929.

## 2 The Roman Catholic Church, Cinema and the “Culture of Dialogue”

### Italian Catholics and the Movies after the Second World War

*Dario Edoardo Viganò*

#### INTRODUCTION

In the years after the Second World War, Italy was considered to be the third biggest film market in Europe. However, within a climate that remained “torn between the Catholic and the Socialist-Communist worlds,” the Roman Catholic Church argued that cinema had to address urgent moral, educational and political problems.<sup>1</sup> The Church understood that the problem was not simply one of putting a stop to “films that could undermine the values of people, families and the whole [of] society,” but that it was also necessary to take action and use “the same means to fight films’ negative and most damaging aspects.”<sup>2</sup>

This awareness was fundamental for the Catholics’ policy of relaunching and upgrading parish cinemas and *cineforums* after the war, an activity that gained significant momentum during the 1950s (see also Chapter 9). However, to understand more fully the reasons for the evolving attitudes of the Italian Catholic Church, it is also important to consider the cultural developments and changes that took place in post-war Italy. This is especially true since the cultural changes were as influential as economic developments. In fact, the American lifestyle, particularly the aspects shown in film, became increasingly popular at that time:

They called it Hollywood on the Tiber: the major companies established in Rome, celebrities [. . .] got off the planes and settled in the best hotels of the city, courted by local celebrities and chased by paparazzi [. . .]. We were all children of Nando Moriconi, obsessed with the American dream, ready to explode like many Coke bottle caps. [. . .] The USA had freed us and, with their celebrities, they conquered us.<sup>3</sup>

Hollywood asserted itself in the Italian market within a short period: in 1946, 600 movies came from the United States, while only 65 were produced in Italy. This invasion of American films was also a reaction to the fascist-era Alfieri Law, which prohibited the distribution of foreign movies



to boost national production. In the post-war period, Hollywood poured all the films that had been previously prohibited by the fascist embargo into the Italian film market.

On a social and economic level, post-war Italy had to face a dire situation in which the gap between a rich minority and the poor seemed irreconcilable and generated strong social discontent. This was especially true in the central and southern regions, where for many, life was a daily struggle for survival. Financial compensation was offered to help with the extensive damage caused by the war. This took into account not just the damage to the industrial sector, but also the agricultural and farming ones. Likewise, the need to provide food was an urgent problem, and was not helped by the high rate of inflation. The devastation that paralyzed the transport system and the destruction in the housing industry also represented serious problems. It was in this disadvantaged social and economic situation that Italian movies, often referred to as neorealism, started to depict the realities of a suffering country. Some of the best known of these movies are Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*, 1945); Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948), which was based on a screenplay by Cesare Zavattini; *Riso amaro* (*Bitter Rice*, 1949), made by Giuseppe De Santis and Luchino Visconti's *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles*, 1948).

Italy was a fragmented country, not only from a social, political and economic point of view, but also from a moral one. In the period just after the Second World War, the degree of support for the Catholic Church within Italian society was still high, and the Christian Democratic Party (*Democrazia Cristiana*, hereafter DC), the political party linked to the Church, benefited from it.<sup>4</sup> Within the political scene, the DC, recognized as "Catholics' exclusive party," considered its ideology as comprising a well-defined system of values that were "more social than religious."<sup>5</sup> However, according to Antonio Lepre, the Church was afraid that it could be prevented from "fulfilling its universal historical role as [the] Holy See." In the post-war period, this fear was most clearly characterized by a fear of Communism, not only among industrialists, small businesses, the middle class and the urban and rural communities, but also among Catholics.

This chapter discusses the relationship between religion and cinema in Italy after the Second World War and argues that the Church's position has been always been twofold. On the one hand, movies were accepted, supported and regarded as a means of education, while on the other hand, there were ongoing moral concerns.<sup>6</sup> The ambiguities underpinning what we will call the Church's "double pedagogy" didn't prevent Italian Catholics from developing a wide range of initiatives and activities in the field of cinema. This contribution will expand on some of these activities, mainly in the field of film exhibition (such as parish cinemas) and criticism. It will also discuss Italian Catholics' engagement with film productions such as Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) and P.P. Pasolini's *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 1964) and *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968).

## THE CHURCH'S DOUBLE PEDAGOGY

Pope Pius XI's 1936 Encyclical Letter *Vigilanti cura* was the first important pronouncement on Catholicism and cinema since the 1910s, and is often considered to represent a summary of Catholic strategies concerning film at that time.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on examples of Catholics' active participation at various levels, from a censorship committee to film criticism, and from production to exhibition, the letter presented a clear and well-defined policy with regard to this new means of communication.<sup>8</sup> For Pius XI, given the impossibility of achieving a true Catholic production, it was necessary to work towards the objective of turning cinema from "a school of corruption into an educational instrument that could elevate humankind."<sup>9</sup> The letter's aim, therefore, was "to promote good films, classify all the others and communicate the judgment to the priests and the faithful."<sup>10</sup>

This 'double pedagogy' in the Church's approach to cinema is most evident in the pontificate of Pope Pius XI. His interventions represented the Catholic Church's broad and systematic reflection on cinema and its effects during the 1930s. *Vigilanti cura* and Pius XI's other interventions are good examples of this, and are important to understanding his pontificate in relation to how the Catholic Church thought about cinema's role within modernity and modern society. His two *Discorsi sul film ideale* (*Discourses on the ideal film*) are his most open and gracious attempts to provide the Christian conscience with a systematic doctrinal and pastoral framework. Within this framework, Catholics were called to recognize the difference between films that could foster personal growth and those that risked compromising their spiritual development.<sup>11</sup>

*Vigilanti cura* was a catalyst in establishing a national institution for film reviews that could provide a 'moral' evaluation of films. This responsibility was first given to the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico* (Catholic Cinema Center, hereafter CCC) and then to the Italian Episcopal Conference, when it was founded in 1952.

## THE ATMOSPHERE OF RENEWAL AND THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

In the 1960s, the international geopolitical scene showed signs of crucial change. The two main protagonists in the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union, introduced and embraced a policy of détente. This policy reflected a widespread fear that the dramatic Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 had come dangerously close to resulting in the use of nuclear weapons. Even though the détente was short lived, it nonetheless marked a period of renewed hope in the dialogue between the two major powers. This hope also reflected confidence in the policy of openness pursued by the American president, John F. Kennedy. In addition, this period was characterized

by economic growth, a desire for change and the appearance of youth-led movements fighting against racial and gender discrimination. Meanwhile, post-war Italian politics were characterized by a new succession of center-left governments, with the DC joining the left-wing *Partito Socialista Italiano* (Italian Socialist Party, hereafter PSI), which included figures such as Aldo Moro, Amintore Fanfani and Pietro Nenni.<sup>12</sup>

In this post-war era, Italy enjoyed a prosperous period, thanks to an economic boom, which introduced a culture of mass consumption. Developments in mass media benefited from the trends of increased consumption. In the early 1960s, the Church—Italy and Rome in particular—experienced the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). This council’s actions are best understood as a process of self-reflection and dialogue with the modern world, in which the Church tried to reassert its tradition, teaching and place in changed times.<sup>13</sup> In December 1963, the discussions at the Second Vatican Council resulted in the publication of a decree on the concerns and problems related to social communication. In spite of identifying a list of media (including film, television and newspapers) and acknowledging the positive potential of mass communication, the Conciliar Decree *Inter mirifica* is, in fact, little more than a cursory list without any in-depth discussion.

One of the results of *Inter mirifica*, however, was Pope Paul VI’s 1964 Apostolic Letter *In fructibus multis*, which rejuvenated Pius XII’s Council for Social Communication. The considered reflection of the Church on cinema and the mass media continued with the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et progressio* in 1971, which offered pastoral guidance on the means of social communication. The Pastoral Instruction was published more than seven years after the Second Vatican Council. Its long consultative process involved people from specific professional fields, including theologians and communication experts. When published, *Communio et progressio* became the ‘Magna Carta’ of the Church in the field of communication. In particular, it emphasized, among the other duties of a Christian community, the importance of the ‘right’ use of social communication media for evangelization. In doing so, the Pastoral Instruction recognized modern media’s “great usefulness [. . .] in the spread of the Christian doctrine.”<sup>14</sup> As for cinema, *Communio et progressio* recognized its “decisive influence in the educational, cultural, recreational and scientific sphere,”<sup>15</sup> suggesting the use of films as a means of evangelization and education.

## PARISH CINEMAS

During the years of the economic boom in Italy (1958–1963), Italian cinema also experienced a golden age.<sup>16</sup> During the early 1960s, with the success of directors such as Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, Vittorio De Sica, Sergio Leone and Dino Risi, the market share of Italian films increased from 33 to 51.7 percent. While American pictures, for the first time since the Second

World War, plummeted to less than half of the total takings in Italy.<sup>17</sup> Even parish cinemas reached their highest level of growth in the national territory at this time. In 1966, in fact, they were spread across Italy and accounted for a little less than 50 percent of all Italian film venues.<sup>18</sup>

In 1956, the Catholic Minister of Finance Giulio Andreotti gave strong support to the Catholic film circuit, as confirmed by Law No. 958 of 1949. This so-called "Andreotti's Law" anticipated the "parish license" and provided Catholic cinemas with a loophole that would free them from the regulations that applied to regular commercial cinemas. This legislation helped to ensure the rapid growth of parish cinemas.<sup>19</sup> However, the large number of Catholic cinemas did not result in significant attendance. Parish cinemas failed to coordinate their efforts in negotiating with the distribution companies, and, given the difficulties in finding suitable films, they failed to establish themselves as a viable exhibition circuit. This eventually led the Catholic world to consider producing its own films, which would meet its own required moral standards.

The CCC supported this idea of a Catholic production, especially during Luigi Gedda's presidency. Gedda was proactive as one of the leaders of the Italian Catholic Action (*Azione Cattolica Italiana*) movement. Likewise, the CCC's collaboration with the screenwriter and director Diego Fabbri, who was appointed secretary-general, also strengthened support.<sup>20</sup> The attempts towards Catholic film production in Italy were, however, modest in comparison to other Catholic cultural strategies. Nonetheless, it is important to start any serious study of Catholic film production by looking at the documentary *Pastor Angelicus* (1942, Romolo Marcellini), which was based on the figure of Pope Pius XII. This production is particularly important in that it generated support for the creation of the production company Orbis Film, which went on to produce Vittorio De Sica's *La Porta del Cielo* (*The Gate of Heaven*, 1945) during the last year of the war in 1945.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, however, these first attempts at film production proved to be financially overambitious. At the end of the war, and almost simultaneously with the bankruptcy of Orbis Film, came a new project that did not involve the CCC directly. Aware of the financial implications for the CCC, Gedda and Fabbri, together with the art director Salvo D'Angelo and the editor of *L'Osservatore Romano*, Giuseppe Dalla Torre, started a new film production project with the company Universalial Film.

Universalial Film's big-budget production of Alessandro Blasetti, *Fabiola* (1949), is important in balancing and explaining the controversial story surrounding support for Visconti's *La terra trema*. Production support for *La terra trema* caused several problems for Universalial, and even generated accusations of Communist support.<sup>22</sup> While the film was initially considered to be the first of a three-episode propaganda documentary for the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party, hereafter PCI), it in fact became an extraordinary film, which drew inspiration from Giovanni Verga's well-known novel *I Malavoglia* (*The House by the Medlar-Tree*).

In order to be involved with this project, Catholics and Communists had to balance their opposing ideologies to reach an agreement to collaborate together.<sup>23</sup>

In terms of production, Salvo D'Angelo decided to use money from the budget for *Fabiola* to produce *La terra trema* with a director who was close to the PCI. However, despite these ambitious attempts in collaboration and funding, Universal Film went bankrupt in the early 1950s, which had already happened to Orbis. This second bankruptcy ended this period of Catholics being directly involved with film production.

While Catholics had failed to create a commercially successful film production company, the number of Catholic cinemas remained high in spite of a lack of national coordination that resulted in their poor management. In an effort to improve management, the Catholic world outlined a plan for the coordination of parish cinemas at a national level by founding the *Associazione Cattolica Esercenti Cinema* (Catholic Exhibitors' Association, ACEC). This happened a few years after the establishment of *Ente dello Spettacolo* (1946), which replaced the CCC as the main point of reference for Catholic cinematographic culture in Italy. It also assumed editorial responsibility for the magazine *Rivista del Cinematografo*, which is the oldest of its kind in Italy.

However, variations in rental costs in different regions meant that the ACEC could not provide an adequate response at a national level. Another national issue was that the parish cinemas were mainly concentrated in cities in the northern and central parts of Italy. This distribution imbalance is evident in that during the early 1960s, there was one cinema for every 3600 people in Lombardy and one for every 7250 people in Sicily.<sup>24</sup>

### OCCASIONS FOR (UNFINISHED) DIALOGUE: THREE CASE STUDIES

The years of the great economic boom have undoubtedly seen a marked progression towards secularization, a process further influenced by Italy's relationships with other European countries and the United States. At the same time, however, this process of secularization was hindered by groups from within Italy, from both a political and a social point of view. The media played an important part in this process,<sup>25</sup> with cinema not only following social transformations, but also at times acting as a catalyst for social change. The best examples of this are found in the films of some of the most important directors in Italian post-war cinema, such as Federico Fellini, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Bernardo Bertolucci, Alessandro Blasetti, Luchino Visconti and Michelangelo Antonioni. Some of their films, such as Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* and *Teorema* are significant for their engagement with the Church.

### *La dolce vita*

While Italy stood on the edge between tradition and modernity, Fellini's *La dolce vita* became a key *casus belli*.<sup>26</sup> If the film's screening at the San Fedele Cultural Center in Milan, on January 31, 1960, generated strong and contrasting opinions, then its general release in Italian cinemas was greeted enthusiastically by audiences. The film also provoked lively debates within the Catholic world. This involved the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini and the Jesuits of the San Fedele Center, especially Father Nazareno Taddei SJ, who was removed from office for writing a positive analysis of the film in the magazine *Letture*.<sup>27</sup> Soon after the screening in Milan, the Milanese cardinal, Montini, intervened and summoned Father Alberto Bassan SJ, superior of the community of the San Fedele Center, to rebuke him for agreeing to screen such a film. Montini also asked Bassan for a correction to be published in *Letture*. However, instead of heeding Montini's request, the next edition carried a favorable review of both the film and its director written by Taddei, which read: "[A] splendid intuition led Fellini to start the film with the sequence of Christ and to finish it with the sequence of Paolina: the intuition of the incarnation of Christ that goes on—even though it is not perceived—in his Mystical Body and reveals itself through the innocent face in a sinful world. In the light of this impressive intuition, the full thematic meaning of *La dolce vita* can be grasped."<sup>28</sup>

Soon after, in March 1960, Montini wrote another letter to the San Fedele Center asking for a decisive intervention. This time, his letter led to both Alberto Bassan and Nazareno Taddei being removed from their respective offices. Montini's intervention against the two Jesuit priests attracted the attention and action of Father Luigi Santi SJ, the provincial superior of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits); Monsignor Angelo Dell'Acqua, substitute secretary of state and, above all, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, secretary of the Congregation of the Holy Office. Their respective reactions provided Montini's curial office with the necessary documentation to prepare a case to denounce Bassan and Taddei to the Holy Office. This action was intended as a warning, as is evident in Montini's handwritten letters, and the 'supreme' ecclesiastical court dealt with the cases related to *La dolce vita* on four different occasions.<sup>29</sup>

It has since become clear that Montini had not seen the movie before denouncing Bassan and Taddei. In fact, he never watched it. The documents filed in Milan suggest that he was probably afraid of the film, and that he feared it might damage his spiritual integrity.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, they reveal that Montini did not know Taddei personally, and therefore support his attempts to dispel any accusations of a possible personal conflict. A surprising and striking outcome, however, is the effect of his intervention on the San Fedele Center and the two Jesuit priests, Bassan and Taddei.

***Il Vangelo secondo Matteo***

As a decade, the 1960s provided opportunities for change. Interesting signs of openness were even evident in the Catholic attitudes concerning morality and censorship. A good example of this is the Church's positive reaction to *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, which was directed by the notorious left-wing writer and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini. The *Organisation Catholique International du Cinéma* (OCIC) not only awarded the film its prize at the Venice Film Festival, in spite of being preceded by many disputes related to its director and the case of *La ricotta* (1963), but also chose to defend its decision.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the editorial decision of *Rivista del Cinematografo* to publish OCIC's response to criticisms about the prize is particularly reflective of a spirit of change and openness. Writing as the president of the OCIC prize jury, Andrés Ruszkowsky addressed misunderstandings about the film's fidelity to the text of Matthew's gospel:

Some do not consider this film a contemporary product, when comparing it to other films that reach screens, but as a filmed version of St. Matthew's Gospel, that should be compared with the printed and commented versions, or with the ideal representations that people have constructed using their imagination [. . .]; no film has ever offered us a version of the Gospel so exempt from artificial sentimentalisms and conventional concessions.<sup>32</sup>

Leandro Castellani also praised the film and considered it "very interesting, [and] maybe the second most interesting film in the history of the religious cinema in Italy, after *Francesco giullare di Dio*" (see Chapter 7).<sup>33</sup> In his positive review, Castellani also argued that the "sacred cinematic representation constructed by Pasolini around Matthew's story shows a personal and striking picture, rigorously orthodox in its general structure and its scrupulous fidelity to the text. Someone could dissent from this picture, but its value and its reserved honest intentions are indisputable."<sup>34</sup> Other important acts of approval included the positive judgment expressed by the mayor of Florence, Giorgio La Pira, and, above all, the applause of 800 Conciliar Fathers during the special screening of the film on October 5, 1964.<sup>35</sup>

Contrasting versions of the story about how the film came to be screened at the council soon emerged. The producer Alfredo Bini said he took the initiative, while Pasolini considered the event to be the expression of a rebel movement. Monsignor Loris Capovilla, secretary to Pope John XXIII, disputes both claims:

I remember perfectly well that during the Council it was publicly announced that there would be a projection of *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* just for the Fathers. It was an official screening, and nothing

was concealed. I think the Secretariat of the Council took the initiative, along with the OCIC. This was anything but rebel movements.<sup>36</sup>

It is evident that the Catholic appreciation of Pasolini's work was a clear sign of détente. As Marco Muscolino argued, it announced the end of the defensive worries of the previous decade about the Communist and Marxist culture.<sup>37</sup> Changes in the critique of the *Rivista del Cinematografo* not only reflected a positive reaction to Pasolini's films, but also an interest in Eastern European cinema, which was part of the Communist bloc,<sup>38</sup> or as Muscolino wrote:

There is, therefore, a renewal of the critique that is particularly evident in the Catholic world: during these years, for instance, *Bianco e Nero*, even though within the Christian Democratic management, assigned Lino Micciché and Giovanni Buttafava the in-depth analysis of the new Czechoslovakian films and the young Russian cinema.<sup>39</sup>

### **Teorema**

Further debates were related to another film directed by Pasolini, *Teorema*, which won the OCIC prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1968. A few days after the festival, on September 14, 1968, *L'Osservatore Romano* published the CCC's negative judgment,<sup>40</sup> and the prosecutor's office in Rome had the film confiscated for its obscene contents. The situation was worsened by a speech delivered by Paul VI (Giovanni Battista Montini) on September 18, 1968, which was published the next day in the magazine *L'Osservatore Romano* under the subheading *Clear warnings from the Holy Father against the trends that do not comply with the authority and the discipline of the Church*:

Then, what would we say about certain recent episodes of occupation of cathedrals, about the approval of unacceptable films, about the collective protests against our recent Encyclical, about the propaganda of the political violence for social purposes, the conformism and anarchic demonstrations as a global protest, or the instances of intercommunion that are contrary to the guidelines concerning ecumenism?<sup>41</sup>

After Paul VI's intervention, Monsignor Jean Bernard, president of OCIC (see Chapter 5), wrote to say that the jury had made a mistake and suggested that the decision was probably affected by a difficult film. Paul VI's response to the admission of an error sternly stated "it is not acceptable that a Catholic Jury, with a public act, encourages the immense cinema audience to watch such a shameful film, despite its artistic qualities."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, in March 1969, the OCIC felt compelled to express regret for the mistake made by one of its juries in giving the prize to the film *Theorem*. In the same



month, Pasolini replied that the “international Catholic film office can keep its prize, and they can also take back the prize they gave me for *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*.” His statement continued, I am “working on a film about St. Paul, that is why I will go on with my ‘dialogue,’ but only with independent and educated priests and, maybe one day, with separatist ones.”<sup>43</sup> As a matter of fact, Pasolini’s “dialogue” with the Catholic world ended after the bad experience of *Teorema*. The project of a film about St. Paul failed due to lack of funding and to the director’s premature death in 1975.

### ***Ente dello Spettacolo and the Magazine Rivista del Cinematografo***

These changes in strategies and concrete practices developed by Italian Catholics after the Second World War can also be observed when looking at the major Catholic film organizations and their publications. The period immediately after the war saw the development of the CCC. This was replaced by *Ente dello Spettacolo* in 1946, which assumed its responsibilities for cinema, and also the general coordination of theater and radio. The *Centro Cattolico Radiofonico* (Catholic Radio Center, CCR, 1940) and the *Centro Cattolico Teatrale* (Catholic Theater Center, CCT, 1943) with its magazine *Filodrammatica* were also established in the 1940s. However, even with time, *Ente dello Spettacolo* did not tend to recognize the centers. Eventually, the CCC ceased to be autonomous and increasingly identified itself with *Ente dello Spettacolo*, which prioritized cinema.<sup>44</sup> *Ente dello Spettacolo* progressively dominated the Italian cultural scene. This was due in part to the official Catholic newspaper *L’Osservatore Romano*, which was instrumental during the years of the crisis in cinema between the 1970s and 1980s. In the early 1980s, after years of crisis, the Italian Episcopal Conference appointed Sergio Trasatti president of *Ente dello Spettacolo*. “In a short time, Trasatti brought back an active role to the *Ente dello Spettacolo*,” first by bringing the magazine *Rivista del Cinematografo* back into regular publication after it had been suspended.<sup>45</sup> In an effort to extend readership through a spirit of openness, Trasatti decided that the magazine could be also distributed by newsagents and not only by subscription.

The transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century brought about further important changes for *Ente dello Spettacolo*, such as its transformation into a foundation in 2006. This move gave it a more important role within the national film scene. The strategy of involving a group of academics also enabled the *Fondazione Ente dello Spettacolo* to promote a strong editorial presence in both its printed and online versions.<sup>46</sup> Particular attention should be given to the *Rivista del Cinematografo* for at least three reasons. First, it is the oldest film magazine in Italy; second, it is connected to the institutional structure of the Italian Church and finally, the cultural debates of more than 100 years of cinema history have passed through its pages. The *Rivista del Cinematografo* was founded in Milan in 1928 as

the official publication of the *Consorzio Utenti Cinematografi Educativi* (CUCE). It was intended as an editorial initiative linked to the magazine *Rivista di Lettere* and, in particular, to its supplement *Rassegna del Teatro e del Cinematografo* (1925–1927). Today, the *Rivista del Cinematografo* is also an excellent example of how Catholics actively promoted parish cinemas. The success of this initiative was essential for Catholic engagement with cinema and was mainly due to the great commitment of the magazine's director, Father Carlo Canziani, who was among the first to recognize the need to educate a more critical audience. The magazine was officially recognized in 1938, when its production moved to Rome and was placed under the direct supervision of the CCC. As mentioned earlier, the CCC later became part of the *Ente dello Spettacolo*. It also published *Segnalazioni cinematografiche*, and was responsible for classifying films in accordance with the requirements of *Vigilanti cura*.

During the post-war period and the 1950s, both official Catholic cultural policies and the *Rivista del Cinematografo* reflected the Church's prioritization of cinema. Under the direction of Luigi Gedda, Pope Pius XII's closest lay advisor, *Rivista del Cinematografo* resumed publication after the war. During these years, the magazine engaged in some important debates (such as the anti-neorealist one; see Chapter 10), which resulted from ideological differences and increasing secularization. When its publication resumed after the war in 1946, *Rivista del Cinematografo* launched an attack against Italian neorealism and the film directors who were the exponents of this new trend in filmmaking. Such intransigent positions were due to a fear that the aesthetics of the new Italian cinema represented evil as a part of its realism.

The spirit of renewal in the 1960s affected the magazine *Rivista del Cinematografo* in that it ceased to be a direct expression of Catholic activities within the motion picture field. This started the magazine on a liberating course in which it tried, as Gian Piero Brunetta wrote, to "abandon its confessional features and open its pages to [the kinds] of problems that were unimaginable soon after the war."<sup>47</sup> The magazine's decision not to take part in the heated debates of the 1960s is significant. *Rivista del Cinematografo* did not review the film *La dolce vita*. Instead, it reported the judgment of the Jesuit periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica*. This decision marked a move away from the 'official' positions, which were still reported and respected, albeit with a different level of participation compared to the past. In the second half of the 1960s, the magazine continued on its progressive course and included analyses of theater, television and radio, thus broadening its communication horizons. This development was in line with *Inter mirifica*, which made no distinction between the media since each medium had the same ability to reach the entire human community.

Starting in 1968 and lasting throughout the 1970s, the magazine went through its most turbulent period of editorial disputes. While the experimentation of a new collective editorial structure introduced different topics,

it also highlighted some of the contradictions that resulted from the great historical and political events of the time: the Second Vatican Council and youth protests. It was the end of a cycle for a magazine that had previously succeeded in relating Catholic social teaching with cinema. From its inception as a little bulletin for cinema operators, *Rivista del Cinematografo* had developed to become a means to coordinate Catholic commitment towards a moral, moralizing and educational cinema. New life was breathed into the magazine in the 1980s, when the president of the *Ente dello Spettacolo*, Sergio Trasatti, led the organization to reassert its place alongside other international proponents of Catholic communication. From the 1980s to the 2000s, after a period of deep recession, *Rivista del Cinematografo* repositioned itself within the Italian editorial scene as a critical magazine that addressed a wide range of topics. In doing so, it became a more concrete expression of the “culture of dialogue” promoted within the general cultural project of the Church.

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### 3 The Rise and Fall of Catholic Hollywood, or from the Production Code to *The Da Vinci Code*

*Thomas Doherty*

Once a match made in heaven, Catholics and Hollywood are now very much on the rocks. Decades of wedded bliss, when the couple nuzzled and cooed, locked in a mutually profitable embrace, gave way to petty squabbles, seething acrimony and, finally, a drawn-out, ugly divorce. Occasionally, the pair patches things up and shares a civilized sit-down, but the reunions are more often tense outings marked by glaring stares and petulant silence. The differences, after all, are irreconcilable. One partner wants moral order—for the sake of the children—the other wants an open marriage where anything goes.

It was not always so. For much of the twentieth century, and for all of Hollywood's storied Golden Age, Catholics kept the American motion picture industry on a tight rein headed down the straight and narrow. They wielded authority pretty much the way an Irish nun kept order in parochial school—stern looks, harsh reprimands and, when their charges stepped out of line, a sharp rap on the knuckles. No wonder then, when the submissive acolytes broke free and ran wild, the Church was bewildered and embittered. Never again would Catholics lord such unquestioned power over an American popular art.

The story of the rise and fall of Catholic sovereignty over Hollywood cinema follows a neat three-act scenario: struggle for control, imperial hegemony and gradual collapse. It is also the story of the operation of pressure-group politics, the progress of an outcast minority into the center stage of American life and the shifting norms of American culture in the twentieth century. Though the moral provenance over the most spellbinding of the popular arts was short lived—about thirty years—it was nearly absolute and unique. Nothing like the Catholic-Hollywood symbiosis operated in any other of the lively arts—not in theater, not in radio, not in television. Only American cinema kept faith with Catholic theology.

From its inception at the turn of the twentieth century, the motion picture medium challenged traditional centers of authority—parents, church, school, state—as had no other industrial-age incursion. The narratives of the rollicking one- and two-reelers revolved around visceral violence, heart-felt romance and anarchic fun—the pleasure principles—and for all the

Victorian nostrums served up at the end, they laid bare a world of new possibilities, not least new moral possibilities. While the intertitles (a piece of filmed, printed text edited into the midst of the photographed action at various points, generally to convey character dialogue or descriptive narrative material related to it) paid lip service to spiritual sacrifice and dutiful obedience, the pursuit of happiness and prosperity in the material world were the frame-by-frame messages. At the movies, the deadly sins were not always lethal; they were positively life affirming.

Moral guardians of every stripe—from evangelical Protestants to Progressive reformers—understood the unholy lure of the screen world to the lower orders and rallied to regulate content and restrict access. Censor boards, usually dominated by the old genteel keepers of the Puritan flame (the wealthy, the female and the Protestant) proliferated. After all, state censorship was not only a cultural norm, but also a legal mandate, sanctioned by the highest court in the land. In 1915, the year D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* conclusively proved otherwise, the U.S. Supreme Court had declared in the case of *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio* (case 236 U.S. 230) that movies were “a business pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit,” and as such had no protections under the freedom of expression clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Like beef and poultry, motion pictures were simply products of interstate commerce that could be regulated by the state.

By the 1920s, however, despite the best efforts of censors and rear-guard watchmen, Hollywood was a brand name and a citadel, command central and head cheerleader for the revolutions in morals and manners wrought by the Jazz Age. From the screens of ornate motion picture palaces, Rudolph Valentino smoldered, Joan Crawford shimmied and Clara Bow flaunted her it-ness. Along with the gendered chaos wrought by female emancipation, the lawlessness fostered by Prohibition and the sexual horizons opened up by the automobile, motion pictures were inculcating and validating new modes of dress, courtship and thinking. In all of this, the “bluenoses” (as the babies of the Jazz Age dubbed the Victorian censors) smelled nothing but trouble.

The first religious group to run Hollywood to ground was the dominant one, composed of the diverse congregations of the mainstream Protestant churches. In 1922, a series of sensational scandals seemed to give credence to the alarums from the pulpit about Hollywood being a sun-drenched Sodom on the Pacific. Tabloid newspapers avidly chronicled the mysterious deaths, drug overdoses and divorces among the ranks of directors, actors and actresses seemingly hell-bent on running headlong to perdition. In the most notorious case, the porcine silent comedian Roscoe Conkling “Fatty” Arbuckle was accused of the rape-murder of a chorus girl during a wild weekend party, a courtroom extravaganza that kept Hollywood's moral turpitude in the headlines for years.

For many Americans, repulsed by the cesspool of sin gushing forth from the screen, the high-profile presence in Hollywood of the third major

religious ingredient in the American melting pot lent a toxic element to the cultural-theological atmospherics. The predominantly Jewish backgrounds of the great titans of what was already being forged into an industrial-strength studio system (Marcus Loew, Carl Laemmle, William Fox, Samuel Goldwyn, Adolph Zukor and the brothers Warner, to name only a few) were Jews, often foreign-born, Yiddish-speaking Jews from the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe and Russia. The non-Christian, non-Anglo lineage did not go unnoticed by nativist critics of Hollywood immorality, some of whom insinuated, some of whom shouted, that the former “pants pressers” would be the ruination of Christian America. The term that became synonymous for the studio heads—the moguls—suggests an alien presence, a tribe of powerful yet foreign potentates.

Besieged by an army of evangelicals and bluenoses, desperate for a figure-head and a quick fix, the moguls formed a consortium, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), and appointed Will H. Hays to head the outfit. A native of Sullivan, Indiana, and a Republican Party kingmaker, Hays was also a nonsmoking, nondrinking elder of the Presbyterian church: the perfect front man for a Jewish-dominated business under assault. “The Hays office” quickly became the shorthand signifier for the official face of Hollywood, with headquarters in New York, next to Wall Street, and connections in Washington, D.C., where Hays had lately served as postmaster general for President Warren G. Harding (1921–1923), whose administration was soon to be as scandal ridden as Hollywood.

Tagged the “czar of movieland,” Hays immediately set about the task of reformation and public relations, solidifying the financial structure of the rough-and-tumble business, speaking soothing reassurances to the public and distributing a prim list of “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” to guide moviemakers along the path of righteousness. In 1927, a kind of liaison office, the Studio Relations Committee, was set up by the MPPDA to encourage compliance with the “Don’ts and Be Carefuls.” Though the bluenoses would always get the vapors around Hollywood shenanigans, Hays succeeded in lowering the volume of criticism and putting the industry on a more upright footing.

Meanwhile, the 1920s had proven boom times for Catholic assimilation into the American mainstream. Though the blight of Prohibition and the xenophobic Immigration Act of 1924 were impressive reactionary counter-measures, the progress of the minority religion in American politics, business and the arts proceeded apace. In 1926, the Eucharistic Congress, a worldwide assembly of the Catholic faithful, was held for the first time on American soil, in Chicago, the most Catholic city in America. Two years later, New York governor Al Smith became the Democratic candidate for the presidency of the United States, the first Catholic to be nominated by one of the major parties. Smith lost, and anti-Catholicism played a part in the opposition’s dirty tricks (pictures of Smith with a phalanx of Roman Catholic cardinals circulated in Protestant strongholds in the South and



Midwest), but Catholics had flexed powerful political muscle and come within striking distance of a great prize.

Like the Protestants, Catholics devoted a fair share of their missionary work to the uplift and suppression of American cinema. In 1929, in a small but telling assertion of their impact on motion picture content, they persuaded Paramount Pictures to bleep a word of dialogue referring to a Catholic chorus girl from the sexy burlesque melodrama *Applause* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1929). A more forceful proof of political-cultural influence was just around the corner.

Hearkening to the Hollywood wisecracks audible since the sound revolution of 1927 and not liking what they heard were two Catholics whose impact on the moral tone of American cinema would be lasting and profound: Daniel A. Lord, SJ and Martin J. Quigley. Lord was a multitasking priest from St. Louis who had been a movie buff since his days as a young scholastic, when he played piano accompaniment for the silent movies screened to his fellow Jesuit initiates. He was first bitten by the Hollywood glamour bug while serving as the Catholic advisor on *The King of Kings* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1927), a biblical epic infused with DeMille's trademark affinity for pagan sex and spectacle. For the rest of his life (he died in 1955), Father Lord considered Hollywood a kind of second parish for his ministrations.<sup>1</sup>

Martin Quigley was editor-publisher of a number of influential trade periodicals catering to the needs of the motion picture industry, most notably *Exhibitors Herald-World*, which after 1931 became *Motion Picture Herald*, an exhibitor-oriented weekly that fancied itself a standard bearer for the thousands of small neighborhood theaters ("nabes" in trade jargon) that operated in the conservative American heartland. A devout Catholic deeply invested in the salutary (and salvific) influence of the movies, he used his editorial perch to lobby ceaselessly for the improvement of the moral climate of Hollywood cinema. Quigley's life's work was to make sure that the motion picture industry adhered to a code of moral guidelines—his kind of a code, a Catholic-minded code. Feeling the need for some intellectual heft and theological expertise, he recruited Father Lord, who was only too glad to lend his Jesuit education to a mission both conceived as God's work.

Between them, Quigley and Lord crafted the most significant document in the history of Hollywood censorship, the Production Code of Ethics, or the Production Code, soon known simply as the Code. They collaborated on the composition and distributed the labor much like a tag team of Hollywood screenwriters, with Lord handling the grand vision and Quigley attending to the practical details. Also, like the work product of Hollywood screenwriters, the finished draft was polished and tweaked by contributors higher up the ranks, in this case, the MPPDA. Some of the injunctions that found their way into the Code—like the cautions about drinking and the prohibition against miscegenation—were inserted by the MPPDA under pressure from dries in the Midwest and racists in the Deep South.

The ethos of the Production Code would have been familiar to any American Catholic raised on the Baltimore Catechism. More extensive and theologically grounded than Hays' childish "Don'ts and Be Carefuls," or indeed any other rationale for screen censorship, it laid out a theological framework for the rawest and most free-wheeling of the popular arts. The preamble declared that, motion pictures being an entertainment for the masses, filmmakers had a special custodial duty to protect the young. Though mature adults with a sturdy religious backbone can withstand the tug of temptations from the screen, children, whose moral armor is not yet hardened, will be susceptible to the allures of sex, violence and worldly vanities. Movies therefore may—and should—"be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life and for much correct thinking," asserted the Code's preamble.

On March 31, 1930, the moguls adopted the Production Code and then promptly ignored it. The lack of an enforcement mechanism, not to mention good faith, made the document a paper tiger. Besides, the studio heads had more urgent matters to attend to. Like the rest of America, the motion picture industry was battered by the Great Depression. For the first time in Hollywood history, box office revenue was in free fall. To lure audiences back into theaters, producers threw heretofore unthinkable fare into the marketplace—lascivious sexuality, sadistic violence and perverse melodrama. Between the Stock Market Crash and the Roosevelt restoration, smack in the middle of the most desperate and catatonic period in American history, the studios gambled on the wages of sin. The come-on advertising was of a kind—visually lurid, transgressively risqué and unabashedly prurient.

The result was a fascinating blip in American motion picture history, a four-year period known to film historians as the "pre-Code era" (an infelicitous description because there was indeed a Code, only a Code ignored and unenforced). Pre-Code films are more sexually explicit (Jack Conway's *Red Headed Woman*, 1932), violent (Howard Hawks' *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation*, 1932), politically subversive (Mervyn LeRoy's *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, 1932) and bizarre, outré, and just plain out-there (Tod Browning's *Freaks*, 1932) than what came before and what would immediately follow.

The Catholics were furious—not just at the ungodly screen content assailing them from theater marquees and billboards, but also from a felt sense of betrayal. In their minds, the moguls had reneged on the 1930 deal and played them for suckers. They would come together to register their protest, and they would not be fooled again.

In 1934, Catholic anger found palpable expression in an organization officially called the National Legion of Decency, more usually referred to as the Catholic Legion of Decency, or, more ominously, simply as the Legion. The shock troops for Catholic action against Hollywood, the Legion was far and away the most formidable and feared of all the private groups monitoring motion picture morality. Its mission was to stop the flow of pre-Code



*Figure 3.1* The most powerful pressure group in the history of Hollywood cinema: members of the Legion of Decency of the Archdiocese of New York meet at the Empire State Club in New York to keep Hollywood on the straight and narrow. Left to right, front row: James A. Farrell, George MacDonald, Alfred E. Smith, John J. Raskob and the Rev. Edward Roberts Moore, representing Patrick Cardinal Hayes. Left to right, back row: James Donnelly, James Dwyer, Arthur O'Leary, Judge Alfred J. Talley, John P. O'Brien, William T. Fetherston, Martin J. Quigley and George Cook, December 20, 1934. Smith was former New York governor and the 1928 Democratic candidate for president, O'Brien was the former mayor of New York and Quigley was editor of the influential trade weekly *Motion Picture Herald* and co-author of the Production Code.

*Source:* Author's personal archive.

profligacy and to assure Hollywood's fidelity to the Production Code, a document that was, after all, a fair summation of Catholic doctrine.

The Legion applied pressure on Hollywood in two crucial ways: first, through its trademark "Legion pledge," in which Catholics raised their right hand to God and promised, upon pain of sin, not to attend immoral movies; and second, by a letter-grade system that judged films by the light of Catholic teaching: Class A-1 (Unobjectionable for General Patronage), Class A-2 (Unobjectionable for Adults) and Class C (Condemned). The C was the mark of Cain, a brand that forbade Catholics from attending the offending film without risk to their immortal soul. Catholics recited the Legion pledge at Sunday

masses, at parochial school assemblies and at Knights of Columbus and Ladies Sodality gatherings. A cinema-centric liturgy, the Legion pledge was a brilliant way to buck up the faithful and terrify exhibitors. It read in part:

I hereby join the Legion of Decency which condemns vile and unwholesome moving pictures. I unite with all who protest against them as a grave danger, especially to youth, and as a menace to home life, to country, and to religion. I condemn absolutely those filthy and indecent motion pictures dealing largely with sex and crime, which are debasing and corrupting the minds and hearts of our people. . . . Considering these evils, I hereby promise to remain away from all moving picture theaters and to attend no motion pictures except unobjectionable ones shown in private homes, parish halls, Catholic schools, and other Catholic institutions.<sup>2</sup>

The grades were printed in Catholic newspapers, distributed in parish newsletters and read out from the pulpit by priests. With the pledge and the grades, the Legion could put moviegoers *out* of seats—measurably and unmistakably cutting into box office attendance in Catholic enclaves.<sup>3</sup>

The outcry against Hollywood was loud enough to be heard in Washington, D.C., where Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program was generating a blizzard of alphabet agencies bent on drawing power away from states and municipalities and into the federal government. The motion picture industry had real, and justifiable, fears that among the agencies on the drawing boards was a federal censorship agency. State and municipalities had sanctioned censor boards since the birth of the movies, but never before had the federal government been on the verge of creating a Washington-based agency vested with censorship power. All too conceivably, a Federal Bureau of Motion Picture Regulation might slip in under the wings of the Blue Eagle.

At this point, yet another Irish Catholic—the most important of all—entered the Hollywood censorship picture, the man who would be the key figure in Catholic control of the movies for the next twenty years—Joseph I. Breen. Born in 1888 in Philadelphia, a second-generation Irish American, Breen was parochial school and Jesuit university educated (he attended Saint Joseph's College in Philadelphia but never graduated), colorful, capable and certain of his mission. In 1931, Will Hays brought him to Hollywood to run interference with Catholics and to serve as an all-purpose troubleshooter. By December 1933, he had become *de facto* head of the Studio Relations Committee, where he struggled to beat back the pre-Code tide from a position of impotence.

That would soon change. Beset by the Legion of Decency and the looming threat of federal censorship, the moguls decided to cut the best deal on the table. In June 1934, Hays dispatched Martin Quigley and Breen to a meeting of the Catholic Bishops Committee on Motion Pictures in Cincinnati.<sup>4</sup> Quigley and Breen had already been in extensive backchannel

communications with the bishops about the fine print. The arrangement they negotiated called for the creation of a special agency under the aegis of the MPPDA, the Production Code Administration (PCA), whose central responsibility would be to enforce the Code. Breen was the consensus choice to head the new agency—he was known as a reasonable guy to the moguls and as a reliable Catholic to the bishops. To give Breen’s decisions coercive force, the MPPDA board stipulated that without clearance from the PCA, Hollywood productions would not get financing from Wall Street. To certify that a film had been vetted by the Production Code, a literal imprimatur of inspection (modeled on the seal that the Vatican bestowed on morally sound books) was fashioned. The Production Code seal of approval—an oval design with the MPPDA initials spread across the top and the certificate number printed inside—would be stamped on the title credits of any Hollywood film (usually unobtrusively in the lower-left corner, amid the



*Figure 3.2* Catholic influence ascendant: Bishop John F. O’Hara (left), former president of the University of Notre Dame and Apostolic Delegate for the U.S. Military; Will H. Hays (center), president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America and Jack L. Warner (right), head of production at Warner Bros., at the gala celebration marking the premiere of the Catholic-friendly war film *The Fighting 69th* (1940) in New York, January 24, 1940.

*Source:* Author’s personal archive.

technical credits). To give the Code additional coercive authority, exhibitors who were contractually bound to the major studios were forbidden from showing films that lacked a Code seal. These controls over financing and exhibition were the decisive administrative reforms that gave the Code such sharp teeth and Breen such fearsome power. Without Breen's official imprimatur, a studio film could not be made in Hollywood or screened around America.

Another crucial institutional reform launched with the PCA mandated that the censoring of Hollywood films was to be performed during the script stage, in preproduction, before the cameras rolled, a process of vetting and negotiation that made the task of censorship rigorous and cost efficient. For months, sometimes years in advance of production, Breen and his staff reviewed script proposals, discussed plot points, blue-penciled dialogue line by line and met with producers, directors and writers to iron out differences. If all worked well, the final 'print review' of the finished film—wherein Breen and the staff eyeballed the 35mm print prior to release—was a formality.

In all of this, the charismatic personality, dogged commitment and sheer bureaucratic efficiency of the man at the helm cannot be overstated. It was the dedicated stewardship of Joseph I. Breen that made the PCA hum as a smoothly operating engine of in-house censorship. A classic Type A personality and detail man, Breen assured that the script review process was performed in a timely and reasonable manner; he was open (to a point) to persuasion and argument and he worked more as a collaborator than an as impediment, guiding filmmakers through the contours of the Code—not undermining the spirit of the document, but making it possible for filmmakers to work within it, often by implying what could not be explicitly spoken. He brought predictability to a process that had been scattershot in Hollywood and bizarre and chaotic in state and city boards. To America at large, the common referent for Hollywood censorship remained "the Hays office," but around the company town, the PCA was known by the name of the alert guardian who manned the gates: the Breen office. Ever playful and punny, the trade press rhymed the name in headlines: a film that had gone through the cleansing process of the PCA was said to have been "breened."

By the end of 1934 then, practically speaking, American Catholics exerted prior censorship over Hollywood cinema twice over: through the in-house self-regulation of the Catholic-minded Breen office and through the ex officio pressures of the Legion. The two-pronged pincer movement gave American Catholics a virtual veto power over motion picture content throughout the classical studio era.

The set of strict, sonnet-like restrictions that outlined the moral universe of Hollywood cinema was soon an agreed-upon network of road signs guiding filmmakers and spectators alike. Leo McCarey's familial melodrama *Make Way for Tomorrow* (1937) is an especially faithful follower of the map laid out for Hollywood cinema under the Code. Opening literally with the script of a commandment ("Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother"), it

tells the tale of two aged, self-sacrificing parents, married nearly fifty years, and the refusal of their selfish children to care for them. At the end of the film—unbelievably, heartbreakingly—the couple is forced to separate, to die apart and alone. Though the children do not act faithfully and morally, the moviegoer knows exactly what constitutes moral and faithful conduct. Under the Code, Hollywood movies do not necessarily end happily; they do, however, end morally. The source story for *Make Way for Tomorrow* was brought to McCarey's attention by Joseph Breen.

Not that the sonnet form of Hollywood cinema was always a straitjacket. Within the rules, an agile director could stretch the framework with insinuation, suggestion and metaphor. In *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942), the roguish Captain Renault (deliciously played by Claude Rains) is obviously trading transit visas for the sexual favors of women desperate to get out of the city. The captain's raised eyebrow and his eager anticipation as he straightens his tie while awaiting the arrival of a pretty young woman in his office signals to the sophisticated viewer that the meeting is not purely bureaucratic. Later, a young wife, evidently weighing her options, asks Rick if the captain is a man of his word. Her eyes and posture, her elliptical language and her tremulous tone suggest the price she is considering paying.

A more visible manifestation of Catholic influence on Hollywood could be seen in the herds of priests congregating on the Hollywood screen. Spencer Tracy in *San Francisco* (W.S. Van Dyke, 1936) and *Boys Town* (Norman Taurug, 1938), Pat O'Brien in *Angels with Dirty Faces* (Michael Curtiz, 1938) and *The Fighting 69th* (William Keighley, 1940) and Bing Crosby in *Going My Way* (Leo McCarey, 1944) and *The Bells of St. Mary's* (Leo McCarey, 1945) made neighborhood theaters as familiar a home to Catholic clergy as big-city parishes. Nuns were less in evidence, but *The Song of Bernadette* (Henry King, 1943) and *The Red Danube* (George Sidney, 1949) made even Catholicism's chaste "brides of Christ" less cloistered from the American mainstream.

Throughout the Second World War, Catholicism maintained its grip on an industry now fully marshaled for wartime service. Priests were the dominant denomination in the combat film genre, seemingly the only Christian soldiers serving in the Chaplain Corps. In the combat report *With the Marines at Tarawa* (U.S. Marine Corps Photographic Unit, 1944), a ship-board Catholic Mass is highlighted, with reverent troops, presumably of all faiths, congregated for worship. The sheer cinematic attraction of the religion—the instantly identifiable image of the vestments and altar; the cathedrals and stained glass; the chalice raised high; parishioners rising, kneeling and making the sign of the cross—made Catholicism instantly identifiable as an emblem of American faith—unlike, say, a cinematic rendering of a Baptist, Methodist or Lutheran service.

For nearly twenty years, the racket worked like a charm for both signatories to the agreement. When precisely the deal started to go bad, when the first cracks began to appear in the impregnable Code edifice, is hard to

pinpoint with precision. Certainly, the images projected on screen during the Second World War challenged the serene pictures projected by Hollywood under the Code. The combat reports and newsreels from the Second World War—which were *not* vetted by the Production Code—meant that portions of the balanced program contained language and imagery that the Code would never have sanctioned in a feature film.

The complex troubles of the post-war world—the psychic dislocations and social upheavals—also created a cultural space for a rival priesthood of experts in human behavior and morality. “Dial O—for O’Malley,” advised Father O’Malley in *The Bells of St. Mary’s*, ready and able to solve any ill in any parish. Yet when coping with the mental breakdowns and juvenile delinquency of the post-war era, many Americans were dialing up psychiatrists and social workers. Increasingly, credentialed experts with diplomas on the wall supplanted the priest as Hollywood’s preferred father confessors. It doesn’t occur to anyone in *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955) or *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) to telephone the likes of Father O’Malley.

Moreover, in synch with the rest of America, Catholics were enjoying the fruits of post-war prosperity and the personal freedom that went with it. As the tight neighborhood parishes of the 1930s gave way to spacious suburban neighborhoods in the 1950s, Catholics became less tribal, less supernaturally minded and less liable to kneel unquestioningly before the dictates of the local priest or remote archbishops on matters not central to the faith. Then, too, feelings of cultural marginality dissipated as the faithful became more successful, affluent and mainstream. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen was on television, and soon a Catholic communicant would ascend to the White House. Secure in their American-ness, Catholics could afford to be less vigilant in protecting their moral turf and bristling at perceived cultural slights.

In October 1954, Breen retired. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awarded him a valedictory Oscar for “his conscientious, open-minded and dignified management of a difficult office,” but even then, the Code was seen as a dusty parchment, the last will and testament of a bygone age. To keep up with the times—and television—minor revisions of the Code were pushed through the Motion Picture Association of America (as the MPPDA was renamed in 1945) in 1954 and again in 1956. Though the Code stood firm on matters of fundamentals, the editorial fiddling suggested that it was not an infallible document true for all times.

Even before Breen had left his post, the barbarians outside the gate were circling, probing for weak spots. In the 1950s, three films shook the Catholic citadel, and in each case the Church, so long victorious in any contest between the movies and itself, was defeated. In turn, the courts, the exhibitors and, most fatefully, the moviegoing public rejected Catholic teachings.

The first defeat sent out the most far-reaching tremors. In 1952, Roberto Rossellini’s *The Miracle*, an episode from the three-part anthology film *Ways*



*of Love*, an import from Italy, incited a legal revolution. The film tells the tale of a dim-witted peasant woman, seduced and impregnated by a stranger she mistakes for St. Joseph, who believes her child is immaculately conceived. The New York State Censor Board (whose official designation was the less oppressive sounding New York Motion Picture Division) had originally granted the film an exhibition license, but when Catholics howled in protest, the board withdrew its license. There the matter might have rested had not the gutsy distributor, veteran foreign film importer Joseph Burstyn, sought legal remedy and pressed the case all the way to the Supreme Court.

The court took the case—and the opportunity to articulate a historical reversal of its earlier opinion on the purely commercial nature of the movies. On May 25, 1952, in a unanimous 9 to 0 decision, the justices decreed that movies were not, in fact, “a business pure and simple.” Film indeed being a medium entitled to First Amendment protection, it was unconstitutional to ban a motion picture as “sacrilegious.” Such meddling by the state came perilously close to prior restraint—“a form of infringement upon freedom of expression to be particularly condemned.” The motion picture medium was no longer mere commerce; it was constitutionally protected speech.<sup>5</sup>

In a strictly legal sense, the landmark decision made no difference at all to the operation of the PCA (which was an agency of self-regulation, a professional arrangement freely entered into by private business entities) or to the prerogatives of Catholic censorship (every group had a right to freely assemble and air its gripes against Hollywood). However, by granting motion pictures status as a medium of free expression, the decision radiated a penumbra effect, making the cultural atmosphere less comfortable with the notion of censorship per se.<sup>6</sup> If state government could not censor a film for being sacrilegious, then why could the Catholics?

A less legalistic motion picture brouhaha dealt the second blow, *The Moon Is Blue* (Otto Preminger, 1953), a risqué sex farce based on a popular Broadway play, was refused a Production Code seal for a number of minor transgressions and a general tone of sexual smarminess, but the objection that got the most press coverage, and that was responsible for the buckets of ridicule heaped upon the Breen office, was the Code’s objection to the use of the word ‘virgin’ in the film’s dialogue. The distributor, United Artists, was not a signatory to the MPAA and, sensing the shift in the prevailing zeitgeist, opted to release the film without a Code seal. Hungry for a marquee attraction in the age of television, exhibitors risked alienating one constituency to attract another. *The Moon Is Blue* was a big hit, probably a bigger hit than it would have been had not the Code denial and a condemnation from the Legion of Decency generated headlines and drawn the curious.

The third blow to Code power and Catholic prerogative was a calculated, in-your-face provocation. Directed by Elia Kazan—so lately a Catholic darling with *On the Waterfront* (1954), which featured a two-fisted priest to the dockworkers who might have leapt full cloth from a Warner Bros. melodrama from the 1930s—and written by playwright Tennessee Williams, *Baby Doll*

(1956) was an exercise in statutory titillation featuring Carol Baker, a voluptuous actress of legal age, playing a nubile nymphet who seemed not to be. The film's advertising one-sheet—featuring a languid, disheveled Baker laid out in a crib sucking her thumb—left little to the imagination.

On December 16, 1956, Francis Cardinal Spellman, New York's powerful prelate, strode to the pulpit of St. Patrick's Cathedral and denounced *Baby Doll* with a fervor he usually reserved for godless Communism. In theme and advertising, the film constituted "a contemptuous defiance of the natural law" and its "conscienceless venal attitude" sent out "a definite corruptive moral influence on the American public." Catholics were instructed to stay away from the picture "on the pain of sin."

Fueling the cardinal's anger was a sure sign of a world gone awry: *Baby Doll* had been passed by both the PCA (formally a reliably Catholic subsidiary) and the New York Board of Censors (formally ready to fold whenever Catholics expressed their displeasure). "*Baby Doll* has been condemned by



*Figure 3.3* Condemned by the Legion of Decency, passed by the Production Code Administration: a lascivious Eli Wallach puts the moves on Carroll Baker's title nymphet in director Elia Kazan's version of Tennessee William's *Baby Doll* (1956), a lust-filled melodrama unimaginable in the days of the Breen office.

*Source:* Author's personal archive.

the Catholic National Legion of Decency,” noted His Eminence, befuddled by the discrepancy. “However, it has the seal of approval of the Production Code and has been passed without a cut by the New York state censor.”<sup>7</sup>

*Baby Doll* was not a big hit, and the fierce Church opposition (the linguistic transgressions of *The Moon Is Blue* did not engender nearly such outrage) certainly hurt the film in conservative enclaves, but the experience again proved that Hollywood no longer took dictation from American Catholics.

In 1960, a showbiz-friendly Roman Catholic was elected to the presidency. Shortly after his inauguration, in his very first filmgoing gesture, John F. Kennedy strolled over to the Warner Theater in Washington, D.C. to attend a screening of *Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, 1960)—a film picketed by the League of Catholic War Veterans due to its screen-credit recognition of the blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo and the blacklisted source novelist Howard Fast. If the Catholic president was defying boycotts and crossing picket lines, why not more ordinary Catholic moviegoers?

The cultural convulsions of the 1960s accelerated the erosion of the Code and the slacking of Catholic power. The signs of a contract no longer worth the paper it was printed on were lit up on theater marquees everywhere. A momentous harbinger was *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), a thriller suffused with sex, violence and the twisted union of the two. By all accounts, the film incited an almost vertiginous sense of moral disequilibrium in spectators. For a generation of American moviegoers raised on the Code, its many shocks to the moral system made *Psycho* a primal movie memory.

The new latitude on screen allowed American cinema to become flirtier and dirtier, as *Variety* might have said (e.g., the early James Bond films and *Kiss Me, Stupid* [Billy Wilder, 1964])—but it also permitted films to become more serious and adult in tone, to exploit the newly won screen freedom for thoughtful, if non-Catholic, ends. In due course, Catholic authorities came under growing pressure to rethink the absolute prohibitions on certain subject matter and images and to consider elements of aesthetics, taste and morality (though, again, not Catholic morality). Surely, there was a big difference between the bawdy teasing of *Kiss Me, Stupid* and the profound moral purpose of *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, 1964)?

Yet the Catholics refused to bend. “Good taste or not, we would never approve a film which thematically condoned evil,” declared Monsignor Thomas F. Little, executive director of the Legion. “We could never give our approval to a picture which said there was nothing wrong with abortion or premarital sexual relations. And, remember, we’re still fighting nudity.”<sup>8</sup>

That last fight was already a losing battle. What for the Legion was the deadly sin of lust was for moviegoers the tantalizing pleasure of the gaze. European art films—notably the French import . . . *And God Created Woman* (Roger Vadim, 1956), in which the only thing biblical was Brigitte Bardot’s lack of attire—had proven there was a huge market for the big-screen exposure of female flesh. Reading the signals, Hollywood moved

aggressively into the art house monopoly—peeling away costuming bit by bit, year by year, in a drawn-out strip tease.

In December 1965, in a symbolic move that was about more than nomenclature, the Legion of Decency changed its name to the less belligerent sounding National Catholic Office of Motion Pictures (NCOMP), exchanging a righteous banner for a staid bureaucratic acronym. In a coincidence that veteran defenders of the faith saw as divinely significant, that very same week came news the Joseph Breen had died in California. The two great symbols of the old order—Breen and the Legion—were both gone.

NCOMP kept up its work: the ratings were published in parish bulletins, the parochial school children were cautioned and occasionally a cardinal inveighed against a film by name. However, as a feared pressure group, Catholics had been defanged and neutered. Catholic objections to the cascade of Code-cracking, catechism-defying films that followed—*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (Mike Nichols, 1965), *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) and *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967)—fell on deaf ears. The MPAA was soon ready to make official what had become de facto.

The official demise of Hollywood's Catholic catechism was presided over by the energetic power broker, Jack Valenti, appointed president of the MPAA in 1966; he would serve until 2004. Though an observant Italian Catholic, Valenti came into office bitterly opposed to censorship of all kinds. He was determined to abolish the PCA and replace it with a ratings system.

In 1968, Valenti achieved his goal. The PCA was formally shuttered and replaced with the Code and Ratings Administration, later changed to the Classification and Ratings Association (CARA). CARA awarded letter grades—in time, they evolved into the familiar G, PG, PG-13, R, and NC-17 categories—and made pro forma attempts to dampen the more extreme displays of sex and violence. Hollywood, however, no longer claimed to self-regulate; it rated. Where it had once soothingly whispered, “be assured,” it now said simply, “be warned.”

Yet the shadow of Hollywood under the Code continued to loom large in American filmmaking, if mainly by way of opposition. A backhanded tribute to the enduring legacy of the Production Code could be seen in how much the Second Golden Age of Hollywood in the 1970s depended upon the deep background of Code cinema for its transgressive jolts. So much a part of the disorientation, the moral chaos and the bleak existential endings that blanketed the films of the era—the whole shock of the new—packed a wallop by being set in relief against the backdrop of the moral universe they were shattering. The most famous curtain line of the decade (“Forget it, Jake. It's Chinatown.”) from *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) is an apt summation of a world no longer patrolled and ordered by the Code. *Chinatown* is a zone of moral confusion—where life is so disorienting, not only do you not know right from wrong, but, in trying to do what is right, you end up doing wrong. In a precinct where there is no possibility of free will and moral action, best to do nothing or “as little as possible.”

Hollywood's Second Golden Age paid tribute to Catholicism in a more visible, through-a-glass-darkly manner. Trailing the incense of Catholic sacerdotalism, *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) bequeathed a new and haunted view of Catholicism to American cinema. Always cinematically congenial to the spooky and the occult (the medieval ambiance, the monks' robes, the cathedral chiaroscuro through stained glass windows), Catholicism proved surprisingly serviceable to the tempo and terrors of the horror film (the dark spaces, the incantations in a dead language, the gesticulations of a secretive, celibate priesthood). In the eighteenth century, the Gothic tradition had tapped into the fears of all things Catholic latent in the Anglo-Protestant imagination, but in film, thanks to the Code and the Catholic influence in Hollywood, the uses of Catholicism for cinematic horror had been roundly suppressed. Henceforth, whether the priest was a holy warrior and the church a refuge, or whether he was an emissary of the devil and the church a haunted house, Catholicism and the horror genre were intimately entwined. So long the superego of Hollywood cinema, the Roman Catholic Church had become the id.

The next decades witnessed the random flare-up or make-up between Hollywood and Catholics, but none of the old, instinctive communion of interests. Ironically, or not, it would be the former seminarian Martin Scorsese who incited one of the few authentic Hollywood-Catholic controversies of the post-Code era with his austere adaption of Nikos Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). Scorsese remained true to the author's reimagining of the crucifixion as an earthly purgatory where Christ was tempted by the things of the flesh, including sexual fantasies. Catholics protested and picketed, but the film played widely, if not very successfully, in theaters across the nation. Mainly, though, for the balance of the twentieth century and into its sequel, Hollywood rejected Catholic values, preferring instead to refashion Catholic set design for mysteries, thrillers and horror films.

Perhaps no film more clearly illustrated the gulf between the Catholic hegemony of the Golden Age of Hollywood and the relegation of Catholicism to the fringes of Hollywood regard than *The Da Vinci Code* (Ron Howard, 2006). Based on the hugely best-selling novel by Dan Brown and starring Tom Hanks, the film is a ripe example of high-profile, big-budgeted Hollywood entertainment. It also wallows in imagery and themes that might have been ripped full blown from the anti-Catholic potboilers, Thomas Nast caricatures and Know Nothing politics of America in the mid-nineteenth century. Ostensibly an exercise in painterly cryptography, it is actually a catalogue of primal bigotries that cast Catholicism as an alien, subversive, conspiratorial and perverse force in American culture, a flashback to a time when Catholics were "papists," Jesuitical was a slur and the Vatican a nest of vipers.

The plot is too silly and convoluted to explicate—something about a secret set of clues left in Da Vinci paintings that reveal the suppressed biography of a post-resurrection Christ who married and fathered children

by Mary Magdalene. To keep the patriarchy in power and to maintain a monopoly on salvation, the original disciples launch a conspiracy across the millennium to snuff out heretics. Possessing unlimited funds and unlimited ambition to do evil, the Church employs self-flagellating assassin-priests and epicurean bishops to lie, scheme and kill while skulking about secret chambers and cobwebbed catacombs around Europe. The atmosphere and plotline might have been lifted whole from Matthew Lewis' anti-Catholic Gothic classic *The Monk*, published in 1796.

The spiritual-cinematic journey from the Production Code to *The Da Vinci Code* tracks the summit of Catholic influence in Hollywood to its present-day nadir. The arc is best traced not in the difference in lighting schemes—from the brightly lit, good-natured priests at MGM and Warner Bros. to the grim, hooded clerics of Gothic Catholicism—but in the relegation of Catholicism to the periphery of Hollywood attention. Today, Catholicism lives on the Hollywood screen as a repository of exploitable medieval ritual, not as theological underpinning, an eventuality that would have been unimaginable between 1934 and 1968. No longer in cultural wedlock, Hollywood and Catholicism have long since called it quits and gone their separate ways.

## NOTES

1. Lord recounts his ministry to Hollywood in his memoir: Lord, Daniel A. 1955. *Played by Ear: The Autobiography of Daniel A. Lord, SJ*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 269–313.
2. "Philly's Pledge," *Variety*, July 10, 1934: 5.
3. A personal note: my father once recalled to me how, as a thirteen-year-old with an interest in seeing Mae West in *She Done Him Wrong* (Lowell Sherman, 1933), he was startled to recognize, as he approached the ticket window of a movie theater in the Irish Catholic stronghold of Norwood, Massachusetts, his parish priest standing outside the theater, eyeing any Catholic who might think of breaking the Legion boycott. "Good evening, Father," he said as he walked by, pretending he was just out for an evening stroll.
4. "Bishops Hope for Film Cooperation But Will Continue Screen Campaign; Meet Again at Washington in Fall," *Variety*, June 26, 1934: 5, 34.
5. For a full discussion of the case, see Laura Wittern-Keller and Raymond J. Haberski, Jr. 2009. *The Miracle Case: Film Censorship and the Supreme Court*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
6. "'Miracle' Victory Heartens Industry, Now Looking to 'Pinky' Decision," *Variety*, May 28, 1952: 2, 18.
7. "'Baby's' Code in Headlines," *Variety*, December 19, 1956: 11.
8. "'If Code Revision Prostitutes Principles, Then Church Must Accept Gulf'—Msg T.F. Little," *Variety*, December 1, 1965: 4.

## 4 Catholicism and Mexican Cinema

### A Secular State, a Deeply Conservative Society and a Powerful Catholic Hierarchy

*Francisco Peredo Castro*

Since the arrival of movies in Mexico, they have met the opposition of the most conservative parts of Mexican society. The press condemned the evolving nature of moving images and considered the emerging medium to be a threat to morality. However, they perceived the cinematograph as an even greater threat, not least for its ability to represent Catholicism and sacred history. Before long, in 1899, the presentation of images of an almost-naked Christ caused public outrage in Guadalajara, a large city in one of the most conservative regions in western Mexico.

The chronophotograph [. . .] has been altered in its frames, and we can say extremely altered, as some of them are far away from following even the slightest moral rules. The entertainment judge should have noticed this from the onset and, guided by the common sense and healthy morals that we assume he should have, he should have prohibited the exhibition of such scenes, which are unhelpful for the welfare of children and young ladies.<sup>1</sup>

This example illustrates how Catholic citizens called on public officers to prohibit film exhibitions in order to uphold the morality of the audience. Another similar such outcry was made when *La vie et la passion de Jésus-Christ* (*The Life and Passion of Christ*, Lucien Nonguet and Ferdinand Zecca, 1903) was shown:

Last Thursday, a major scandal took place at Veracruz's Main Theater following the launch of the chronophotograph [. . .] During a scene of *The Life and Passion of Christ*, the crowd became out of control when Christ forgot to dress and appeared in his underwear.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually, as adult material gained terrain in theaters 'for lonely men', the exacerbated outcry from parts of Mexican society went beyond the conservative media. Despite not officially being authorized for such a role, the Catholic hierarchy presumed the role of censor. A French exhibitor, Enrique

Moulinié, recalled years later that his main obstacle in bringing film screenings to Mexican provinces was:

the religious fanaticism of some people, who rejected the showing of movies, because they regarded them as evil. . . . Even the civil authorities, either because in some cases [they] shared that superstition or to avoid conflicts with the people who attacked them (through the press, manifestos, etc.), pronounced themselves against movies and denied permissions for opening of movie theaters. In many cases, it was necessary to give private functions for civil and ecclesiastical authorities [ . . . ] And only then, they gave licenses and communicated to the timid people that [the films] were not in conflict with the holy principles of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup>

This proves the emergence of censorship before exhibition, albeit in a nonofficial manner, which was later followed by the practice of self-censorship. Both the conservative press and the Catholic Church were precursors of official film censorship in Mexico.<sup>4</sup> In this process, two organizations would play a key role. The first was the Catholic fraternal service organization *Orden de los Caballeros de Colón* (Mexican Order of the Knights of Columbus), created in Mexico in 1905 and backed by the highly conservative American Knights of Columbus (established in the United States in 1882), a society of Catholic men intent upon defending and strengthening Catholicism in the world under the principles of charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism. Both the American and the Mexican societies took Christopher Columbus as their patron saint, since he introduced the Catholic faith to the Americas/North America. The second Mexican conservative organization involved with censoring films was the *Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia* (National Parents Association, UNPF). Both groups would grow into the powerful network of parental associations in different Mexican cities. Meanwhile, in 1906, both associations demonstrated heavily against the violent and immoral images screened in movie theaters.<sup>5</sup>

During the final years of the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship (1877–1911), the conservative press, in associated groups such as the *Asociación Nacional de Prensa Católica* (Association of National Catholic Press, launched in 1909),<sup>6</sup> joined forces with the Catholic Church to campaign against film screenings and to strengthen their pressure on the authorities. The precedence set by inspections and the subsequent closure of different theaters in Mexico City was repeated throughout the country.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, this same model of moral-religious censorship was exerted over foreign films, particularly US films, and soon became appealing to Mexicans. In 1911, a newspaper in Guadalajara highlighted “the clamor coming from Europe and the US against the nasty school of immorality and objective delinquency that so-called cinematographers have become.”<sup>8</sup>



It seemed that public authorities had yielded to pressure from the conservatives, as they were called to keep an eye on ‘social morals’, that is, Catholic morals. By 1910, the year the Mexican Revolution started, there was an official censorship bureau already in place. Between 1910 and 1920, Mexican film censors were highly sensitive regarding newsreels about the revolution, and also films containing war propaganda from belligerent parties in the First World War, as they tried to control the image of Mexico and Mexicans in American films. Also, more generally, they censored movies on the basis of Catholic and conservative values.

### MORAL CATHOLIC CENSORSHIP DURING THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION (1910–1920)

During the period of 1910–1920, the most contentious stage of the Mexican Revolution, Mexico City set the standards for the other major Mexican cities. In Guadalajara, in 1916, the local censors, the *Comisión de Diversiones* (literally Entertainment Commission), agreed to “prohibit, as it has been done in Mexico City and in other cities that follow strict moral and order rules, the exhibition of scripts that may damage the pure thoughts of our children.”<sup>9</sup> The Catholic clergy censored films such as *Notre-Dame de Paris* (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Albert Capellani, 1911).<sup>10</sup>

Foreign films portraying adultery, prostitution and crime were fiercely criticized for allegedly promoting such behavior among audiences.<sup>11</sup> In an effort to counter the dangers of ‘immoral cinema’, some Mexican cities, like Mérida, took up initiatives such as ‘white Fridays’ for families, which consisted of morally acceptable programs.<sup>12</sup>

In the legislative realm, the first Legal Cinema Regulation (*Reglamento de Cinematografos*) was enacted in Mexico on June 23, 1913. This was amended two months later to prohibit films that contained scenes of “derision or insult to any religious belief, the Army or the Police.”<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, on September 3, 1919, the Internal Rules of the Office of Censorship and Film Laboratories (*Reglamento Interior de la Oficina de Censura y Laboratorios Cinematográficos*) were passed. These guidelines were published in the Official Journal of the Federation on October 1, 1919, restricting the exhibition of films “offending public morals in their content or captions.”<sup>14</sup> Eventually, on October 19, 1919, a censorship commission was set up.<sup>15</sup>

During this period, as a response to the anti-clerical provisions in the new Mexican Constitution (enacted in 1917), the Order of the Knights of Columbus was set up as a formally constituted social organization. This marked the beginning of a conflicting coexistence between the Catholic Church and the emerging Mexican post-revolutionary regimes. The Catholic Church embarked in a relatively underhanded political practice to challenge and hinder, through covert subversion, the newly established Mexican revolutionary state. On their part, the so-called ‘revolutionary family’, made up of

politicians, moved from a true secularism (1920–1940) towards their own political games with the Church from 1940 onwards. This underhanded process has been labeled as the restoration of Catholic power in Mexican society, and eventually in politics.<sup>16</sup>

This framed the attitude of Catholics towards cinema and their relations with political bureaucracy. Even if initially radical seculars dominated Mexican politics, ultimately, moderate and even conservative sectors prevailed. This inspired the following consideration on Mexican Catholicism made several years later by De la Rosa: “it is apparently a deeply conservative Church, with links to powerful economic groups, including the *Partido Acción Nacional* (National Action Party), and yet it is in connivance with the most reactionary groups of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party).”<sup>17</sup> As we will see later, this was born secular in 1929 and turned conservative after 1940, when the right wing of the party became dominant over the left.

## TOWARDS THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY REGIME . . . AND OF CENSORSHIP (1920–1934)

Once the most intense period of the Mexican Revolution and the First World War was over, attention to film censorship regained its importance. In addition to overseeing films denigrating the Mexican image, the censors returned to controlling ‘social morality.’ The *Consejo Cultural y Artístico de la Ciudad de México* (Mexico City Cultural and Artistic Board)<sup>18</sup> was set up in 1922, the same year that the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) was established in the United States.

Two main sets of interests converged on this occasion, on the one hand, the political-diplomatic-propagandistic interests of Mexican authorities, and on the other hand, the moralistic interests of the Catholic Church and its followers. The Order of the Knights of Columbus and the *Unión de Damas Católicas* (Catholic Ladies Union, 1912) concurred with US Catholicism, as institutionalized in the brand-new office of Will Hays, which soon would hold its sway over the Mexican film industry.

Such a convergence led to the establishment in Mexico of the *Oficina Central Supervisora de Películas* (Central Bureau for Film Supervision) to “guarantee [that] only those films considered by the supervisors to be suitable for public and national morality would be exhibited.”<sup>19</sup> During that time, guidelines for censorship were developed, and nationalism and morality soon became lenses through which to supervise the films.<sup>20</sup>

Driven by a short-lived concurrence with the government, Mexican Catholicism became more extreme. However, the young community of Mexican cinematographers and critics confronted the arbitrary behavior of Adriana and Dolores Elhers—“the Elhers sisters”—who were in charge of the government censorship office around 1920.<sup>21</sup> The resulting temporary

relaxation of censorship practices permitted the exhibition of films such as *Man and His Woman* (J. Stuart Blackton, 1920), in which the main female character appeared naked posing for a painter.<sup>22</sup>

The screening of the film pushed the Mexican Catholic Church to its limits. The Church convened a clergy commission—composed of the highest religious authorities—that would use Sunday services to lead a campaign against ‘immoral cinema.’ The influence of international Catholicism was simultaneously felt. In April 1921, Pope Benedict XV created the *Film Institute di San Marco* (San Marco Film Institute) for the production of ‘dignified and instructive’ religious representations, with the objective of promoting films for educational and moralizing purposes.

When, between the late 1910s and the early 1920s, US Catholics created organizations like Sacred Films Incorporated, the Bible Film Company, the Christian Herald Motion Picture Bureau, the Religious Motion Picture Foundation and the International Church Film Corporation, Mexican Catholics strengthened their collaboration with both the Vatican’s international Catholic network and with their US counterparts. Since they were all devoted “to the production of non-theatrical films for church use,”<sup>23</sup> this led to the first attempts of Mexican Catholics to work on a plan of action towards the construction or purchase of their own theaters, the creation of their own distribution agencies and even the creation of a production company, called *La Mexicana*. Their aim was to counter the ‘film immorality’ portrayed in Mexican, Hollywood and European movies by showing their own religiously biased film productions through their own Catholic distributors and theaters.<sup>24</sup>

These groups decided to publish lists of theaters deemed unsuitable and of ‘immoral’ films in the national journal *La Dama Católica* (*The Catholic Lady*). By showing restraint, the Catholic Ladies Union soon gained the trust of the Luxemburg-based International Union of Catholic Women’s Leagues.<sup>25</sup> In 1924, the Catholic Ladies Union opened a film theater in Mexico City, and it is possible that they may have opened more theaters in other Mexican cities. While there is no strong evidence, it is said that the companies in charge of film exhibition boycotted the Catholic Ladies Union through the *Federación Teatral* (Theater Federation). Also, Mexican audiences, even if mostly Catholic, indeed found great pleasure in consuming ‘forbidden’ images, such as the US films *Male and Female* (C.B. DeMille, 1919) and *Short Skirts* (Harry B. Harris, 1921).

Mexican society was immersed in a debate over social transformation, which seemed to be driven by cinema. Between 1924 and 1928, when a new government proved even more anti-clerical than its predecessors, prospects for Mexican Catholics took a bleak turn towards uncertainty. In 1926, during the *Cristero* civil war (waged between the Mexican Federal Army and armed Catholic groups), when the advance of ‘immoral cinema’ seemed unstoppable, Mexican Catholics received news of the adoption of a new morality code for US cinema, as drafted by Will Hays.<sup>26</sup>

The morality code was adapted to the Mexican context, and was eventually promoted. In the process of adaptation, it became clear that Catholic censorship on film exhibitions in Mexico had already developed on two main principles. The Vatican guidelines and their repercussions in the United States both influenced Mexico.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, during the new civil war (the *Cristero* war), the Catholic journalists in the Mexican press continued to insist that “measures should be taken to ensure the moral, aesthetic and beauty of films.”<sup>28</sup>

By 1929, the radical and anti-clerical groups of the ‘revolutionary family’ had become the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (National Revolutionary Party, PNR), a party that ruled Mexico for the next seventy-one years under different names. During that same year, the *Cristero* civil war came to an end with a victory of the Mexican federal government (seculars) over the Catholic dissidents. Thanks to mediation from US diplomacy, Mexican Catholics were forced to abide by what had become the most radical Constitution in the Americas concerning religious matters.<sup>29</sup>

Notwithstanding their formal agreements with the Mexican authorities, the Catholics strengthened their religious associations.<sup>30</sup> Three important societies merged to become the *Acción Católica Mexicana* (Mexican Catholic Action, 1929). Film Historian Guillermo Zermeño argued that this symbolized the intention to unite all branches of Catholic movements into a single organization. This unifying practice followed the same pattern of state corporatism prevalent in Mexican politics.<sup>31</sup>

From this point on, the Mexican censors became increasingly ambitious. They censored theater plays, films, radio shows, publicity and the print press, among other media. In 1930, representatives from nineteen production companies and film exhibition circuits approved a new Advertisement Code.<sup>32</sup> As was the case with film exhibition, the code was, in fact, an adaptation of similar codes in the United States. They asserted that with the new *Código de Publicidad* (Advertisement Code), Mexico would be in line with the normative framework of the International Advertising Association based on “truth, honesty and integrity.” The Mexican code established in its fifth principle that “no text or illustration shall ridicule or pretend to ridicule any religion or faith [. . .] illustrations of characters in religious costume are only allowed if they are respectful.”<sup>33</sup>

Although at the time it seemed that the two irreconcilable foes of the Mexican governmental authorities and the Catholic Church were united, time proved they were never so radically opposed in matters of cinema, education and culture. Among all the Mexican Catholic organizations, the National Parents Association, the Order of the Knights of Columbus and the Mexican Catholic Action were the most influential in domestically determining the relations between Mexican society and cinema. Externally, the international character of the Catholic Church was invigorated by the activism encouraged by *Divini illius magistri*, an Encyclical Letter issued by Pius XI in December 1929. This coincided with the amendment and

reinforcement of the Hays Code for Hollywood censorship by Daniel Lord, a Jesuit priest, and Martin Quigley, a Catholic layman who edited *The Motion Picture Herald*.<sup>34</sup>

An important reason for the amendment of the original Hays Code was the emergence of sound film, which apparently implied new dangers for audiences. Catholic censorship against movies was tightened by the Vatican, and consequently in Mexico and the United States. Discussions among Catholics dealt with the issues of “sound films and universal happiness” through the “scientific, industrial, commercial, political *and religious* applications of sound films,” as well as their outreach.<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, in Mexico, the Jesuit priest Joaquín Cardoso proposed in 1930 the launching of film distribution circuits administered by Catholics.<sup>36</sup> Simultaneously, Catholic censorship lingered on with its public validation or condemnation of movies. For example, in 1932, it was reported that “the highest authorities of the Mexican Catholic Church were satisfied with the moral tendency of *The Man Who Played God* (John G. Adolphi, 1932), asserting that far from damaging consciousness, it calls for both reflection and the moderation of habits.”<sup>37</sup>

The connections between domestic cinema and both Mexican and US Catholics were solidifying. In 1933, the Mexican film press wrote that *La Calandria* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1933) was exhibited in Los Angeles, California, to an audience mostly composed of high-ranking Catholic Church authorities.<sup>38</sup> Later, on March 4, 1934, the Mexican press announced that the American Catholic Legion of Decency (later, the National Legion of Decency) had stepped up its campaign as a moral authority. Furthermore, both Protestant clergy and the US Central Board of Rabbis had joined with them.<sup>39</sup>

Following these events in the United States, as well as the papal encyclical on Christian education for the youth and its clarion call to the representatives of the *Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique* (International Federation of Film Critics), the Mexican Order of the Knights of Columbus, headed by Enrique Traslosheros, founded the *Legión Mexicana de la Decencia* (Mexican Legion of Decency) in 1934. This was the first board of Mexican censors (from civil society) that formally adapted American film censorship criteria to the Mexican context.<sup>40</sup>

## CATHOLIC CENSORSHIP VIS-À-VIS SECULARISM AND ‘SOCIALISM’ IN THE CÁRDENAS REGIME (1934–1940)

By the end of 1934, a blueprint for establishing the *Instituto Nacional de la Industria Cinematográfica* (National Institute for the Mexican Film Industry) was drafted in Mexico and new censorship laws were proposed. In contrast to the previous prohibition of attacks on religion,<sup>41</sup> the new blueprint issued by the Cárdenas regime banned the “apology of any religion” and the promotion of fanaticism through the “exaltation of religious motives” in movies. There was a significant difference compared to the past, as the

Cárdenas regime believed that religion manipulated individuals and promoted fanaticism.

Mexican Catholics reacted again.<sup>42</sup> Once more, it became evident that Mexico had adopted US censorship schemes, when in 1936 a Cinema Skipit Club was established. Following the model of the “Don’ts” and “Be Careful” lists issued by the Production Code Administration for Hollywood,<sup>43</sup> it was proposed in Mexico to avoid the production of scripts that could result in artistic and, consequently, economic misfortunes.<sup>44</sup>

The advances of the Cárdenas regime against Catholic culture inevitably increased Catholic activism in Mexico. Worried by the possible ‘attacks on religion’, the ‘promotion of class struggle’, and so on, Mexican Catholics drew on the teaching of Pope Pius XII and launched a crusade, asserting that it is “extremely urgent to attend the field where the most acute moral war against the Church is waged, and to substitute immoral [films] with moral and educative [ones].”<sup>45</sup> Consequently, inspired by Pius XI’s Encyclical Letter *Vigilanti cura*, the 1937 Pastoral Letter of the Mexican Episcopate on the moralization of manners was addressed to film screenings.<sup>46</sup>

New censorship regulations were issued in Mexico in 1938,<sup>47</sup> which entailed using models developed by Hollywood to control the action and dialogue in Mexican films.<sup>48</sup> The Latin and Catholic nature of Mexicans was in part alluded to by the *Directorio Cinematográfico Internacional de México 1938–1939* (International Mexican Film Directory 1938–1939). Section II of that document, addressing the depiction of sexuality in films, stated that “ethics regarding the morality of the sexes shall *portray the Latin woman in the high level of virtue for which she is recognized worldwide*, and a high moral standing of Latin men should also be praised, as is not usually the case in Anglo-Saxon countries.”<sup>49</sup>

In addition, Section II stressed a need to ensure that “marriage with inferior races that tend to degenerate the white or Indian race, should be prohibited or punished when portrayed in films.”<sup>50</sup> Sections V and VII of that document should have also been meaningful to Mexican Catholics. Section V prohibited “the contempt of God, or sacrilege, and insults to the Deity, Christ, the great prophets and the saints [. . .] along with all that may lead to contempt of any religion.” Finally, the code established that “the same ethics are applicable to advertisements related to the propaganda, exploitation and exhibition of films.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, it was assumed that even projects whose title might generate conflict should be cleansed by changing it. This happened with the project of the film *Virgen Pecadora* (*Sinner Virgin*, Joselito Rodríguez, 1946), whose title was changed due to “the morality prevailing in our times.”<sup>52</sup>

## CATHOLIC MAGAZINES FOR FILM CENSORSHIP IN THE 1930S

The history of Catholic publications censoring films in Mexico is as long as the presence of cinema itself. Since 1899, *La Defensa* (*The Defense*), a “Scientific, Literary and Current Affairs Magazine,” was a Catholic publication

in the Mexican state of Jalisco that stood against film ‘immoralities.’<sup>53</sup> Later on, around 1918 and also in Jalisco, the Catholics distributed pamphlets amongst the population in Guadalajara, mostly to church-goers as they left services, prohibiting their attendance to films such as the American fantasy film *A Daughter of the Gods* (Herbert Brenon, 1918).<sup>54</sup>

In January 1930, the newsletter of the Order of the Knights of Columbus was circulated. From the first issue, it emphasized its worries with respect to morality in the cinema and the possibility of creating a ‘moral’ film club. On December 20, 1933, the Bulletin on Film Censorship of the Order of the Knights of Columbus was issued and distributed through the National Parents Association.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, its title was changed to *Apresiasi de Censura Cinematográfica* (Appreciations on Film Censorship).<sup>56</sup> Encouraged by Pope Pius XI who ‘blessed’ the Censorship Board of the Mexican Legion of Decency and proclaimed the need to expand this effort throughout the world,<sup>57</sup> Mexican Catholics launched in 1935 the publication *Christus. Revista Mensual para Sacerdotes* (Christus. Monthly Magazine for Priests). This apparently contained a brief film guide.

### THE TRIUMPH OF CATHOLIC REASON (1940–1952)

In December 1940, whilst the exacerbation of censorship generated public controversy in the United States, Manuel Ávila Camacho was inaugurated as the Mexican president (1940–1946). As a politician, he was considered a ‘moderate’ and a ‘gentleman.’ During his inauguration speech, he declared that he was a believer and reduced the anti-clerical policies promoted by his predecessors.

Governmental censorship of films and the media increased during this period, but mostly in relation to matters concerning the Second World War and the need to contain Nazi-Fascist propaganda. In March 1941, the Ministry of the Interior, which was responsible for censorship in Mexico, issued a *Reglamento de Censura Cinematográfica* (Regulation on Film Censorship). However, the Mexican Catholic community swiftly decided to use the network of relations, organizations and publications that they had developed over the last forty years.

Consequently, on October 10, 1941, a public official institutionalized the Mexican Legion of Decency. This was the beginning of an era of Catholic censorship, not only for foreign films, but also Mexican ones.<sup>58</sup> Censorship of Mexican films became easier because both censors and film workers were mostly Catholic.<sup>59</sup> There were also Jewish, Lebanese and foreign film producers, but they adapted themselves to the prevalence of the new hegemonic Mexican Catholicism.

Apart from that, the Mexico-US alliance for the Second World War also prompted a kind of Pan-American Catholicism, propelled by the United States. ‘American Catholic associations [. . .] responded eagerly to the

[Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs] OCIAA's call for [a] hemisphere defense and were encouraged by grants and other means to organize inter-American events and deepen contacts."<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, based in Los Angeles, California, initiated contacts with Mexican Catholic associations, such as the Order of the Knights of Columbus.<sup>61</sup> During the same period, the American League of Decency approved of the exhibition of Mexican films in the United States, without any objection, as they now worked in full concordance.<sup>62</sup>

The Mexican film industry, involved in the continental propaganda campaign for Pan-Americanism and hemispheric unity, produced a large number of films with historical-religious-Catholic content for the Mexican and Latin American audiences, who shared language, history, culture and religion. The most meaningful example was *La virgen que forjó una patria* (*The Virgin Who Forged a Motherland*, Julio Bracho, 1942). In this movie, Ramon Novarro continued his appearances in religious films from the silent era in Hollywood to the spoken movies in Mexico. After his leading role in *Ben Hur* (Fred Niblo, 1925), Ramón Novarro starred in Mexico's *La*



Figure 4.1 Print advertising of *La virgen que forjó una patria* (*The Virgin Who Forged a Motherland*. Produced by Films Mundiales. Directed by Julio Bracho. México, 1942).

Source: Author's personal archive.



*virgen que forjó una patria*. In a scene, Juan Diego, the Mexican Indian of the legend related to the appearance of the Virgin Mary as an Indian Virgin to become the loving mother of all the Mexicans, shows to the priests the proof of the miracle. The Virgin of Guadalupe (the Virgin Mary) came to him and asked for the construction of a cathedral in her honor, in Mexico City, by 1535. Juan Diego was chosen by the Virgin to transmit the message to the priests. As they did not believe in the words of an Indian, the Virgin herself decided to appear before the priests as a divine print in Juan Diego's robe, with a bunch of roses that he collected where there was no possibility of picking them up. This was the pinnacle of Mexican Catholic nationalism.

In most cases, to prevent further problems with censors, film producers hired 'willing' scriptwriters. In this sense, it was reported that Pedro Calderón hired the Catholic writer Alfonso Junco to write the script for his forthcoming production, *San Francisco de Asís* (*Saint Francis of Assisi*, Alberto Gout, 1943).<sup>63</sup>

The Mexican Catholic authorities had never been directly involved in film production. However, in 1940, they managed to venture into this realm. Their previous role was limited to challenging foreign and Mexican films that were exhibited without their consent. Nonetheless, a concrete example of advice given by the Catholic Church on filmmaking is in the production of the movie *El Secreto del Sacerdote* (*The Priest's Secret*, Joselito Rodríguez, 1940). The *Newsletter of the Mexican League of Decency* expressed "its satisfaction for having been consulted to supervise the script for the movie."<sup>64</sup> Later on, Catholic Church authorities directly supervised the shooting of religious films, as in the case of *Jesús de Nazareth* (*Jesus of Nazareth*, José Díaz Morales, 1942), when finally they issued a "Letter of the Mexican Catholic Church approving the film" for its release.<sup>65</sup>

Such gushing film discourses were highly appreciated by some critics in the United States, who considered them ideal, especially given the international tensions that were taking place. When the Mexican film *San Francisco de Asís* (1943) was released in the United States, the Motion Picture Herald's reviewer called it "an ambitious costume project." He also added that "at this moment in history, with civilization bitterly contesting the savagery of barbarians, and the democracies fighting the forces of evil, turning to the spiritual for solace makes its showing particularly appropriate."<sup>66</sup>

It was clear that the power of Catholic censorship in Mexico gained momentum during Ávila Camacho's administration, especially since Catholic groups exerted open pressure on civilian authorities. In July 1943, the Mexican film press announced that the *Cámara Nacional de la Industria Cinematográfica* (National Film Industry Chamber) had issued a memorandum asking filmmakers to choose screenplays based on censorship guidelines, which also address issues of 'morality.' This was a period of heightened tensions. Some liberal filmmakers and modern, independent journalists fought against the censorship groups,<sup>67</sup> who had allied together

with conservative filmmakers and journalists who celebrated the emergence of Catholic subjects in Mexican films.<sup>68</sup>

By the end of 1944, the Mexican film press reported that the Ministry of the Interior sent Mexican officials to the United States to study the censorship systems used in Hollywood "because they aimed to adapt and apply them to the Mexican film industry."<sup>69</sup> Besides official efforts, Mexico and Hollywood also experienced similar trends: producers in both film industries agreed to censor themselves. Yet, most of the opposition to film censorship came from the creative professionals in the industry: directors, scriptwriters, scenarists, etc. For these reasons, the Mexican Union of Film Directors launched a campaign against film censorship carried out by the Ministry of the Interior's *Departamento de Supervisión* (Supervision Department).<sup>70</sup>

In 1945, the Ministry of Education engaged in a "crusade" against "immoral songs and dialogue in plays, radio and films," inviting the audience to denounce what they deemed offensive.<sup>71</sup> Governmental support for censorship encouraged the high-flown tone of Mexican Catholics in their paranoia and censorship against films;<sup>72</sup> by 1949, these groups expected films to "expound convincing morals." The empowerment of Catholic groups seemed unstoppable, and their influence on cinema and its by-products (such as publicity or film news) was escalating.

In 1947, the head of the Ministry of the Interior's Supervision Department drafted a special regulation for the newsreels and adverts shown before the movies.<sup>73</sup> The subsequent federal administration in Mexico, led by Miguel Alemán (1946–1952), decreed that only "correct" and "suitable" films, considered of "national interest" would receive official support. This implied censorship before shooting, as economic support for the production from the government depended on the script being approved by new official boards. Zermeño sharply underscores that "by the end of the 1940s [. . .] an environment of global moralization emerged from the shared interests of the Catholic Church and governmental authorities, as both considered that the nation was endangered."<sup>74</sup> The Catholic view was now almost consistent with the official view.

Furthermore, the Cold War environment exacerbated fears about the "promotion of social struggle" that worried Mexican Catholics during the post-revolutionary regimes. Therefore, documents produced by the Mexican Catholic Action at the end of the 1940s once more insisted on the need to censor "situations that may deepen social or racial conflict," which even if being "a truthful reflection of reality [. . .] incite hate between social classes."<sup>75</sup>

Several authors consider that the period 1948–1953 constitutes a peak in the actions of the Mexican Legion of Decency. In order to strengthen their 'surveillance,' the Legion addressed Mexican Catholics on December 8, 1948, the feast of Immaculate Conception.<sup>76</sup> The faithful were instructed "not to attend unsuitable shows to preserve the purity of good manners."

Towards the end of Miguel Alemán's administration, the Catholic community was outraged by the success of an emerging genre of low-budget gaudy Mexican musicals, which in some cases depicted stories of brothels, nightclubs and 'fallen women' (the rumba film). This led to the introduction of new regulations for the Mexican film community. Consequently, in 1951, a new set of norms on self-censorship for writers and members of the Union of Mexican Film Workers was drafted. Likewise, the Filmmaking Industry Act was also drawn up as a bylaw in the same year. Articles 69, 71, and 74 of the act are similar to the norms provided by the Church's Bureau of Revision and Censorship.<sup>77</sup>

Aiming to develop a more sophisticated and professional censorship process, the legislation proposed that censoring bodies should comprise pedagogues, psychiatrists or psychologists and lawyers or social workers.<sup>78</sup> In the field of filmmaking, and due to the fact that the US anti-Communist film *Guilty of Treason* (Felix E. Feist, 1949) was prohibited in Mexico, the Mexican film industry shot its own version of the life of the Catholic cardinal Josef Mindzhenty, who struggled in Hungary against Soviet Communism.<sup>79</sup>

In May 1951, during a political crisis generated by the corruption of Miguel Aleman's regime (1946–1952), the Mexican bishops issued a joint pastoral letter in response to what they saw as the social and political breakdown of the country, attributed to corruption and the social sin of liberal conflicts.<sup>80</sup>

The subsequent administration, led by Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952–1958), called for a "moralization" of national life. Such a political moralization comprised the imposition of 'decency' through a National Moralization Commission, which was created on August 18, 1953.<sup>81</sup> Following the motto "we should better stop the prevailing immorality or we will sink,"<sup>82</sup> public officers, businesspeople and Catholic organizations committed to "joining the new crusade."<sup>83</sup> This would become the heyday, the glory, of the Catholic Church in Mexico against films.

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**Part II**

**Leaders**



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## 5 Jean Bernard's Fight for 'Good' Cinema in Luxembourg

*Paul Lesch*

One of the largely forgotten Catholic film leaders in Europe was Father Jean Bernard (1907–1994), a priest originating from the small Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. For nearly forty years, Jean Bernard was one of the main forces behind the International Catholic Organization for Cinema (OCIC), founded in 1928. Student of and later assistant to the *chanoine* (canon) Abel Brohée at the University of Louvain in Belgium in the late 1920s (see Chapters 1 and 15), Bernard quickly integrated the latter's ideas about the attitude that Catholics should adopt concerning film into his writings and his work.

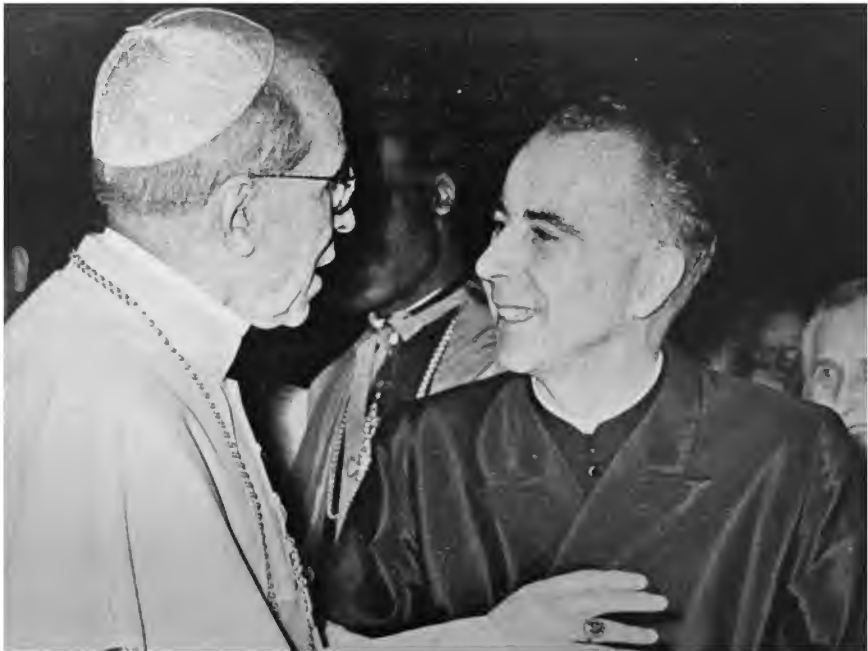
As an assistant to Brohée, Bernard was actively involved in the preparation of the first Congress of the OCIC in Munich in 1928. His language skills (German and French) and his unwavering commitment made him a valuable collaborator.<sup>1</sup> In 1933, when Brohée was elected president of the OCIC, the young Jean Bernard became secretary-general of the organization, based in Brussels. After being ordained a priest in Luxembourg in 1933, Bernard divided his time between the Belgian capital, where he worked for the OCIC, and the Grand Duchy, where he was the part-time parochial vicar during the weekends.<sup>2</sup> At that time, he also wrote for several Catholic publications in his native Luxembourg.

In 1941, Bernard was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to the Dachau concentration camp. After the war, he wrote about the painful experiences that marked his life in a series of articles. In 1962, they were collected in a book entitled *Pfarrerblock 25487*,<sup>3</sup> part of which was adapted for the screen in 2004 by the filmmaker Volker Schlöndorff in the film *Der Neunte Tag* (*The Ninth Day*). After the liberation of Luxembourg in 1944, Bernard became the director of the Catholic daily newspaper *Luxemburger Wort*. Due to the health problems he suffered as a consequence of his imprisonment in Dachau, he retired from his post in 1958, but continued to write for the newspaper as an editor. For many years, he was responsible for the weekly movie section of the paper, which again reflected Bernard's strong sense of commitment to his native Luxembourg.

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (with an area of 999 square miles and a population of 315,000 in 1960) is a predominantly Catholic country,

in which in the Catholic Church has played a significant social and political role for many years. Starting in 1919, the Christian Social Party deeply affected the country's political life by being a part of every government (with the exception of 1925–1926 and 1974–1979) in coalition with either the Liberals or the Socialists. Although the impact of the Catholic right on Luxembourgish society and politics has been strong, it has never been absolutely dominant, due to the existence of important Liberal and left-wing organizations, parties and movements. As a result of an increasing secularization of Luxembourgish society since the early 1970s, the political, social, educational and cultural influence of the Catholic Church has declined significantly.

This power shift has obvious implications for the collective and individual efforts of Catholics to moralize cinema. However, the problems of diminished influence were not insurmountable, and Jean Bernard is a particularly good example of how Catholics responded to secularization. His whole life, including his long-time presidency of the OCIC, was marked by both a profound interest in and a passionate commitment to film, both on a national and on an international level. This chapter will draw on Bernard's publications and activities in Luxembourg, which enable a better understanding of his vision and his approach towards cinema. First, we will



*Figure 5.1* OCIC President Jean Bernard meeting with Pope Pius XII in 1958.

*Source:* SIGNIS.

consider his programmatic articles in publications such as *Luxemburger Volk*, the weekly journal of the Catholic *Volksverein* (a Catholic lay organization), the influential Catholic daily newspaper *Luxemburger Wort* and the intellectual journal *Academia*. These writings clearly follow the thinking and the philosophy of his mentor Abel Brohée, as well as those promulgated by Pope Pius XI in his 1936 Encyclical *Vigilante cura*. Second, we will investigate his attempts to practically implement his ideas and projects in Luxembourg.

## JEAN BERNARD AND THE OCIC

The International Catholic Organization for Cinema was co-founded in 1928 by the Belgian canon Abel Brohée. This organization, which existed until 2001 when it merged into SIGNIS (World Catholic Association for Media) in November of that year, has been defined by Jean Bernard as a “federative union of the national Catholic film offices of all the countries, for the purpose of mutual exchange, assistance, cooperation in the service of film and, through film, at the service of the people. Also, in its religious dimension.”<sup>4</sup>

Upon Brohée's death in 1947, Jean Bernard was elected president of OCIC, a position he held for a quarter of a century until 1972. On the occasion of the fourth Congress of the OCIC, which took place in Brussels in 1947 and included representatives from nineteen different countries, Bernard declared that “it is necessary (. . .) that the spirit of our meetings is truly international! One cannot, indeed, solve on a national level a problem which is international in nature.”<sup>5</sup> Bernard especially thanked those participants coming from distant countries, since their presence helped the OCIC to become increasingly global. Over the years, the number of Catholic national offices joining the OCIC grew steadily. By 1969, no fewer than forty-seven countries on five continents had become members of the organization.

Chaired by Jean Bernard, the international organization was very active. It organized international congresses and ‘study days’ in the four corners of the world, which explored cinema-related topics such as film criticism (Madrid, 1952), the moral classification of films (Cologne, 1954 and Dublin, 1955), film education (Madrid, 1952), the promotion of good films (Havana, 1957 and Paris, 1958), film and youth (Vienna, 1960), film exhibition (Venice, 1964) and the apostolate through films (Cuernavaca, Mexico, 1966).

Jean Bernard was also actively involved in the creation of the film journal *Revue Internationale du Cinéma* (OCIC's official publication), of which he was a member of the editorial board for several years. More than 150 issues were published between 1949 and 1973. The first five issues appeared in no fewer than three different languages (English, French and Spanish),

and were printed by the *Imprimerie Saint-Paul*, the printing house that, like the *Luxemburger Wort*, belonged to the Luxembourgish bishop. From 1951 onwards, the journal, which was printed exclusively in French, regularly devoted thematic dossiers to topics as diverse as film and missions, the moral classification of films, cinema behind the Iron Curtain, spirituality on the screen and different national cinemas. The journal was well respected by its contributors and featured renowned specialists such as Henri Agel, Charles Ford, François Mauriac and Graham Greene.

From 1955 onwards, the organization annually awarded the “Grand Prix OCIC.” Among the films awarded are *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1955), *Un condamné à mort s’est échappé* (*A Man Escaped*, Robert Bresson, 1957), *The Old Man and the Sea* (John Sturges, 1958), *The Diary of Anne Frank* (George Stevens, 1959), *Judgment at Nuremberg* (Stanley Kramer, 1962), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan, 1963) and *Il Vangelo secondo Mateo* (*The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1964). These awards were intended to show “the direction in which the OCIC would like to see film develop.”<sup>6</sup> Starting in 1947, the Catholic organization was also represented each year at several major film festivals (including, among others, Cannes, Berlin, Venice, San Sebastian and Punta del Este), where it awarded the “Prix OCIC” (not to be confused with the “Grand Prix OCIC” awarded annually) to the film considered to be “the best one from a Christian point of view.”<sup>7</sup> The award-winning films normally did not fail to mention the OCIC award in their marketing and advertising strategy such as posters and newspaper ads, which also boosted the international reputation of the OCIC.<sup>8</sup>

## THE PROGRAMMATIC WRITINGS

In about a dozen feature articles published in Luxembourg between 1928 and 1961, Jean Bernard presented his plans and ideas concerning cinema. The main topics covered are those of censorship, moral classifications, film criticism, the influence that Catholics could and should have on the quality of films produced and distributed nationally and internationally and the attitudes that the Catholic spectator should adopt towards film more generally.

Early on, Jean Bernard distanced himself from the largely hostile attitude of the Luxembourgish Catholic right towards film that had prevailed for many years. He was an advocate of a more nuanced and less contentious approach and regretted the total rejection that had characterized the relationship between Catholic institutions and the cinema for more than thirty years. According to Bernard, since the Catholic population did not express an interest in good cinema, films had been adapted to the taste of the mass audience, causing a significant drop in quality. He was concerned that the “major cultural force of today, which forms the world of tomorrow, is

developing without us." He was particularly severe with Catholic intellectuals, who by their lack of interest in and their elitist and even hostile attitude to what they often considered the "theatre of the poor," were at least partially responsible for the deplorable state of world cinema during the 1920s and 1930s. He deemed Catholic elites guilty of a real "sin of omission."<sup>9</sup>

In almost all his articles, Bernard, aware of "the enormous influence that film has on the formation of the modern world,"<sup>10</sup> stated that the Catholic Church must be open to new technologies and modern media. In his eyes, Catholics' attitude towards film and radio should be based on an "approval founded on God."<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, he criticized the "average" film as a "frightening void of ideas," deploring its "intellectual anemia (and) its lack of originality." Furthermore, he criticized the fact that the "overwhelming majority" of films ignored the "spiritual side and the supernatural destiny of man." On the other hand, he believed not only in the artistic, but also in the moral and ethical potential of cinema. For Bernard, film was "the most powerful instrument (the Church has) to shape the soul of the crowds." He compared it to a "prodigal son who had abused his brilliant abilities to apply them to evil more often than good." Yet he refused to confine himself to the simple denunciation of "evil" caused by films. In his view, such an approach was dangerous and counterproductive. Despite the issues and ethical problems engendered by film, he encouraged Catholics to "love" what he described as one of the "most brilliant inventions of the human spirit."<sup>12</sup> In 1959, he wrote that "first of all, before criticizing movies and trying to improve them, we must love them," and he continued that "the demands we raise in respect to [film], are only the expression of the confident hope we put in its infinite possibilities."<sup>13</sup>

According to Bernard, Catholics had to work together to improve the moral and ethical quality in the world of film production. He did not ask the film industry to mass-produce films of a religious nature, but demanded that "religion have on the screen the place it has in reality in the lives of normal people of our time." He wished for films in which "the sympathetic characters think and act in accordance with Christian morality." Furthermore, they should "refrain from showing evil in a way that raises passions and invites imitation."<sup>14</sup>

To improve cinema, Catholics had to intervene at all levels of the film industry: production, distribution and exhibition without, however, forgetting the public.

## PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF MOVIES

Like Abel Brohée, Jean Bernard was in favor of a Catholic involvement in the production of feature films "that conform to their desires." The goal was not to "supplant the big production houses," but to produce half a dozen films that would serve as a model for other producers, and could

thus improve film production in general: “It is sufficient that such a film has some success, to soon see the emergence of five, ten other films on the same subject. You will easily understand our favorite formula: ‘Let’s create a genre, it will be imitated.’”<sup>15</sup> Displaying an unflinching optimism bordering on naivety, Bernard proposed to “throw (. . .) into a corrupted profession a crystallized nucleus around which will gather the elements of good, a raising agent which will soon reform the whole dough.”<sup>16</sup>

The idea of film production (whether Catholic or not) is feasible only in countries with an adequate infrastructure (see Chapters 6, 7 and 10), which was not the case in Luxembourg at the time. Therefore, Bernard proposed that the Grand Duchy contribute financially to the production of such films abroad.

In this context, it is interesting to note that the young idealist film buff Jean Bernard had himself directed a twenty-minute short film, shot on 35mm, about life in his Luxembourg seminary, *Mat Laïf a Séil am Seminaire (With Body and Soul in the Seminary)* in 1931–1932.<sup>17</sup> In 1989, almost sixty years later, he participated as a member of the board of the *Imprimerie Saint-Paul* (the publishing house of the *Luxemburger Wort*) in the creation of the movie production company Videopress. Among the few films produced or co-produced by the company is Volker Schlöndorff’s 2004 film adaptation of Jean Bernard’s *Pfarrerblock 25487* about Dachau. *Der Neunte Tag (The Ninth Day)* corresponds perfectly with Bernard’s idea of a “good” Catholic film, dealing in a “decent” way with relevant moral and ethical issues.<sup>18</sup>

## FILM EXHIBITION

Given that, according to Bernard, film theaters constituted “the contact point and link between the film industry and the public,” Catholics should try to “win an influence” over them. He saw the role of the cinema theaters as all the more important because they were forming “public taste little by little.”<sup>19</sup>

By the late 1920s, Bernard was interested in the question of film exhibition. He refused to leave the monopoly of it to commercial and secular cinemas. Catholics should not limit themselves to attacking the films they despised, but they should offer viewers a real alternative. In 1929, Jean Bernard lamented the reticence of Luxembourgish Catholics to involve themselves with film exhibition. At that time, the first Catholic film theater had just opened its doors in Luxembourg City. This was not enough in the eyes of Bernard, who considered it necessary to react quickly to outwit secular competition by opening in the cities and villages where there were none. He believed that one should open small parish cinemas, which only needed small premises, technical equipment suitable for small rooms and a few folding chairs. The success of such parish cinemas would depend on the “skill of the organizers” and on

good publicity.<sup>20</sup> If such movie theaters were able to present 'nice' Catholic films at reduced prices, they could compete with secular cinemas. Indeed, the commitment of Jean Bernard and other Catholic film buffs brought about the creation of numerous cinemas in parishes throughout the country during the 1930s. Thanks to Bernard's good contacts with Catholic institutions specializing in foreign film distribution, Luxembourgish parish cinemas benefitted from a preexisting international distribution structure, which allowed them to offer viewers regular programming, with films in line with the Catholic faith and morals. Due to a manifest lack of historical documentation, it is difficult to assess the success of these parish cinemas.

In 1937, Bernard's approach was already more nuanced with respect to Catholic film exhibition. He still believed that it was important "to win influence over the film theatres,"<sup>21</sup> but the strategies he proposed were not quite the same as those ten years hence. While he was convinced that Catholics should invest money in existing cinemas and support cinema managers ready "to keep away from their screens harmful programs," he was rather hesitant regarding the creation of new Catholic cinemas. With regard to "the mentality of the current public," a cinema could only function on the condition that it did not appear openly as a Catholic theater and when from a technical point of view and in terms of comfort, it could compete with the secular movie theaters.<sup>22</sup>

During the 1950s, Bernard participated in the establishment and operation of a rather successful art-house cinema (Vox) and a film club (Forum), run for a couple of years by Catholic groups in Luxembourg City and presenting a high-quality program.<sup>23</sup>

## THE PUBLIC

For Jean Bernard, the production of films by Catholic companies could only be one solution among others. Likewise, Catholic cinemas, even if they were successful, could not, by themselves, improve the average quality of movies. In his view, most of the fight for "good cinema" needed to be fought by the public. According to Bernard, the public was not only the spectator, but also 'producer' and 'legislator' of films. As a spectator, the public had a right to be informed about the moral value of films. The Church should offer guidance and direction through movie reviews, as well as the moral classifications set by Catholic institutions.

Bernard had a very high opinion of the film critic whose mission was "to judge the work, to inform, to guide and even to educate the spectator."<sup>24</sup> He did not want to overstate the influence of film reviews, but he also refused to minimize it. He believed in the educational potential of film criticism. For him, the goal was not to "fill film theatres for one film and empty them for another." If the "direct effect" of film reviews was "not always clearly



visible,” they nevertheless had an impact on the medium in the long term: “The spectator, who, using his freedom, visits a film despite the negative reviews he has read, sees it with different eyes and with a mentality influenced by what he has read before. Warned, he will be less hooked and will react against stupidity, falsity, ugliness or moral disorder.”<sup>25</sup>

Pitfalls to be avoided by the Catholic film critic are “aesthetic formalism” on the one side, and “moral formalism” on the other. In general, Bernard was opposed to what he called “petty Puritanism.” It is not about denouncing one or the other daring scene, but rather, the “misconceptions that permeate so many films” and save the viewer from “the infiltration of the slow poison of doctrinal errors.”<sup>26</sup>

As a collaborator, then a director and finally an editor of the Catholic newspaper *Luxemburger Wort*, undoubtedly the first newspaper in the country, Bernard had a large, potentially very influential, media platform at his disposal. With a circulation of over 50,000 copies (for a total population of about 300,000 inhabitants), the *Luxemburger Wort* reached at that time a large proportion of the Luxembourgish population. Throughout the years, the Catholic daily participated in an active, combative and often militant way in discussions about films in Luxembourg. In 1934, it introduced a weekly column on cinema, a page that Bernard contributed to, and which, from the end of the 1950s onwards, was coordinated by him. Like Bernard, who estimated that aesthetic pleasure does not justify the viewing of a morally indefensible film, the Catholic newspaper refused to limit its reviews to purely artistic appreciations. The moral content took precedence over any artistic consideration. The ‘saving of souls’ was considered more important than aesthetic pleasure. Compliance with Christian morals also prevailed over political beliefs. In the 1930s, the Catholic daily denounced the political tendency of a film only on rare occasions. In 1935, Jean Bernard nevertheless expressed his disapproval of the ideological inclination of the Gustav Ucicky film *Das Mädchen Johanna* (*Joan of Arc*, 1935) because he did not “feel sympathetic to the glorification of a popular leader.”<sup>27</sup>

Even though one may not agree with many of the positions towards different films that the *Luxemburger Wort* adopted over the years, one must recognize that it was the only daily newspaper in Luxembourg to offer its readers, almost continuously for more than seventy years, a regular and serious cinema section.

## THE MORAL CLASSIFICATIONS

In accordance with the Encyclical *Vigilanti cura* and with OCIC’s official policy, Bernard insisted especially on the importance of the moral classifications of films made by the Catholic Church. In Luxembourg, they were published on a daily basis in the *Luxemburger Wort*. In 1959, Bernard devoted a long article to the question of moral classifications, explaining their philosophy and the processes of setting them. Among other issues, he reflected

on the question of whether the technical and artistic quality of a film should be taken into consideration in the rating. He believed that for ambitious "thesis films" defending values contrary to Catholic morality (e.g., euthanasia), the artistic quality accentuates the "danger" represented by them, while isolated erotic scenes "likely to offend decency" are less "harmful" if they are filmed in an artistic way. An "attenuating circumstance" that should encourage the censor to be more "lenient" with respect to certain scenes is the factor "distance." Bernard suggested that "the more a film, its philosophy, its images, its genre are 'distant' from the viewer, the less dangerous it is."<sup>28</sup> This "distance" may be chronological (historical films), geographical (truly exotic topics) or psychological (fantasy films and slapstick). For Bernard, the classification of films should be nuanced and not lost in the details. So-called 'daring' scenes are less problematic than films, which by their philosophy, are absolutely contrary to the core values defended by the Catholic Church.

According to Bernard, "as a direct result of his religious beliefs," the Catholic viewer is forced "to comply, in his choice of film programs, with certain rules of prudence."<sup>29</sup> Bernard appealed to the Catholic audience's sense of responsibility and of guilt, noting that while the moral classifications were made for the "general public, the average public, neither intelligent nor stupid, nor uncultivated, nor really educated, neither saint nor demon," the intellectuals, who according to him are better equipped to confront morally 'bad' films, are nevertheless obliged to strictly respect them in order to set a good example to those with less education, who are "helplessly delivered to the evil coming from the screen."<sup>30</sup> Bernard addressed young Catholic intellectuals in Luxembourg, explaining that it was their duty to "enlist in the phalanx of those who fight for a better cinema, a better radio and a better press."<sup>31</sup>

Bernard was particularly interested in the protection of children and youth who, in his opinion, were the most helpless against the bad influence of certain films. Age limits decided by national film censors (in this case, the Luxembourg film commission) did not meet with his approval. He believed that the members of these state commissions not only made their decisions based on criteria different from the Catholic institutions, but that they also lacked the same sense of responsibility. Therefore, he advised parents not to rely on official age limits and refer instead to the Catholic classifications. In addition, Bernard continually worried that the implementation of state board decisions was often deficient due to a lack of seriousness on the part of cinema owners, and because the police controls were, in his opinion, neither strict nor frequent enough.

## THE PUBLIC AS 'PRODUCER' AND 'LEGISLATOR'

Throughout his life, Bernard subscribed to the maxim that "every ticket in a movie theatre (is) a ballot in favor of good or bad film," a quotation frequently repeated in the columns of the *Luxemburger Wort* over

the years. The budget balance for the majority of film productions was very “delicate,” in the eyes of Bernard, and a “small but very disciplined minority,” which faithfully observed the instructions of the Church in matters of film, could have a positive influence on the moral value of a major part of global film production.<sup>32</sup> He believed in the power of the public to make “the success or failure of a given film” and to thereby exercise a “decisive influence on all factors of the film industry, from the film theatre to the producer.” The best model to copy was that of the Legion of Decency, which had, according to him, “revolutionized” American film and had managed to “significantly improve the overall level of the film production” in the United States. According to Bernard, the cinema audience also had the opportunity to influence legislation on film exhibition in their respective countries. It could “put a healthy amount of pressure on governments demanding the improvement of film legislation or a more strict enforcement of existing requirements.”<sup>33</sup> Bernard was opposed neither to total bans, nor to editing out certain scenes.

All these goals could only be achieved under the condition that the Catholic cinema audience was properly supervised and effectively organized. With this in mind, in 1937, Bernard participated in the creation of a committee called *Ciné-Radio-Presse*, whose aim was “to protect the public against the dangers of (. . .) bad film, radio and harmful press.” Furthermore, its objective was to create “a Catholic public opinion” concerning the mass media, to mobilize and organize it “in order to gain satisfaction for our just demands” by using “propaganda, boycott or collaboration,” as well as by exerting “pressure on professionals and on public authorities.”<sup>34</sup>

The press played a key role in the organization and the ‘guidance’ of Catholic film spectators. As already noted earlier, for Jean Bernard, the *Luxemburger Wort* was an important and potentially influential vehicle for disseminating his ideas. Film reviews and moral classifications, as well as more general articles aiming to educate readers in matters of film, received a large readership. One should, however, not overestimate the effectiveness of these means of influence, especially with regard to the moral classifications. While a number of faithful Catholic readers followed the instructions of their newspaper, the commercial success of some of the films severely condemned by the *Luxemburger Wort*, such as *Clochemerle* (Pierre Chenal, 1947) and Roger Vadim’s *Et Dieu . . . créa la femme* (*And God Created Woman*, 1956), shows that the authority and the influence of the Catholic newspaper was far from being absolute.<sup>35</sup>

The limits of the influence of Jean Bernard, the newspaper *Luxemburger Wort* and the Catholic Church in general on the Luxembourgish public’s choices regarding films are illustrated in a striking manner by the scandals surrounding the programming in 1952 of the German film *Die Sünderin* (*The Sinner*, Willy Forst, 1951) and in 1972 of the Danish film *Quiet Days in Clichy* (Jens Joergen Thorsen, 1970).

## MEDIA CAMPAIGNS AND CONTROVERSIES

In the early 1950s, *The Sinner* provoked some of the most heated debates over a film ever to take place in Luxembourg, following a particularly offensive media campaign by Jean Bernard. The Catholic Commission *Ciné-Radio-Presse*, chaired by Bernard, had contacted all cinema owners across the country asking them not to screen the film.<sup>36</sup> While some bowed to the will of the Catholic organization, others were not impressed. When the prestigious cinema Mariiaux decided to show the film, Catholics resorted to drastic measures by launching, among other initiatives, a massive press campaign. In more than a dozen articles, including an editorial, the *Luxemburger Wort* violently attacked the film, denouncing the "irresponsibility" of the cinema owner and complaining about the "indifference" of the political ("Die Filme der Woche" 1951) authorities that would not apply the existing laws. Under the thinly veiled threat of a boycott, Bernard's newspaper even encouraged retailers and café owners to remove the posters of the film from their establishments.

It wasn't the famous scene in which one can briefly see the naked breasts of the actress Hildegard Knef that provoked the anger of the *Luxemburger Wort*, but the overall morality conveyed by the film, especially the positive representation of euthanasia. "This film not only shows objectionable images," Bernard argued, but "it conveys a message which, disguised in a seductive form, is the total negation of everything we call decent and Christian."<sup>37</sup> In the context of the post-war period, the fact that a film dealing with the issue of euthanasia was German did not play in its favor, especially with a Catholic newspaper editor who had known the horror of concentration camps. In an editorial, the *Luxemburger Wort* did not hesitate to allude to the harmful influences the Germans were subjected to under the Nazi regime: "(The government) must reject this film by Willy Forst, impregnated with the nihilism of a generation morally impoverished and disturbed by the war and Nazi influences."<sup>38</sup>

*The Sinner* triggered resolute and radical viewpoints all the way up to the highest ranks of the Luxembourgish Catholic hierarchy. On November 10, 1951, the bishop of Luxembourg launched a strong appeal against the film, which was published on the front page of the *Luxemburger Wort* and read out across the country by priests during Mass on Sunday, November 11, 1951. Influenced by the campaign launched by Bernard and his newspaper, about 100 Catholics showed their disapproval of *The Sinner* by holding placards while demonstrating loudly in front of cinemas showing the film.

According to several newspaper reports, the protesters also threw stink bombs. The *Luxemburger Wort* warmly applauded the protests against the film. Following this stormy demonstration, the Catholic newspaper called on politicians to draw their own conclusions. By referring to the law of 1922 on cinema exhibition, which foresaw the possibility of banning a film that 'had given rise to scandal,' the *Luxemburger Wort* demanded that



Figure 5.2 Influenced by the campaign launched by Jean Bernard and his newspaper, in 1951, Catholics loudly demonstrated against *The Sinner*. Source: Author's personal archive.

*The Sinner* be banned. However, despite this major offensive against the film, the Socialist Minister of Justice Victor Bodson, a member of the coalition government between the Christian Social Party and the Socialist Party, did not ban the film in question.

Twenty years later, Jean Bernard and the *Luxemburger Wort* launched a new major campaign against another motion picture. This time, they reacted against the Danish erotic film *Quiet Days in Clichy* (1970), which was adapted by Jens Joergen Thorsen from a book by Henry Miller. Before the film's release, Bernard contacted the cinema owner who had planned to screen it, predicting 'problems' if he did not withdraw it from the program. However, the owner of the cinema did not comply with Bernard's wishes.

On the day of the gala opening of *Quiet Days in Clichy*, the state prosecutor ordered the seizure of the film on the basis of an article of the Penal Code, which prohibited the import of 'obscene' products. The whole affair ignited an intense controversy and fierce debates in the country's press. The *Luxemburger Wort* and Jean Bernard, particularly offended by the nihilistic and anti-bourgeois ethics of the Danish film, defended the prosecutor, while the rest of the country's press protested against this act of censorship. The majority of the papers criticized the "reactionary and clerical opinion-makers" of the *Luxemburger Wort*, who were accused of having pulled the strings in this affair. According to the journalist and future Socialist Deputy Prime Minister Jacques F. Poos, the seizure of the Danish film showed that

"in Luxembourg, the *Luxemburger Wort* continues to rule the roost, politically and morally (. . .) The timeline shows that this stormy denigration campaign was instigated by the clerical newspaper. Father Bernard cried wolf and the prosecutor struck."<sup>39</sup> After a trial that lasted almost two years, the cinema owner was acquitted of the charges laid against him. Bernard's last crusade against the relaxation of morals and the crumbling of traditional society resulted in bitter failure.

Aware of the fact that, in an increasingly secularized society, controversies and scandals about a film on moral grounds actually generated more interest, the Catholic right stopped launching media attacks against 'reprehensible' films in order to avoid providing them free advertising. Consequently, from the late 1970s onwards, the approach of 'silent contempt' prevailed among the Catholic right when it came to 'objectionable' productions.

## CONCLUSION

Jean Bernard spent much of his life and his professional activities promoting quality films, both in Luxembourg and internationally. He recognized film as a cultural object that could also serve the interests of the Church and the Catholic faith. His main strength was that he took film seriously and gave it its rightful place in the press and in public discourse. His fight was not without resistance, even within his own ranks, but this did not stop him in his endeavor. If Jean Bernard was always very open to modern technology, he was bitterly opposed to other aspects of modernity, such as the effects of the rampant secularization of Luxembourg society. His religious beliefs and his experience of Dachau made him uncompromising on topics such as euthanasia or social nihilism. This explains the vehemence and firmness with which he launched his crusade against films such as *The Sinner* or *Quiet Days in Clichy*. However, Bernard's initiatives in favor of banning films that the Church considered unacceptable had only a limited success. With few exceptions, political and legal institutions did not follow the calls for censorship from the Catholic right in general, and from the *Luxemburger Wort* in particular.

Jean Bernard certainly succeeded in reaching a large Catholic readership through the movie reviews, the moral classifications and the calls for boycott published in the *Luxemburger Wort*. However, despite the media power at his service, his privileged social position and his close contacts with some of the country's Catholic political elite, the overall effect of his activity did not achieve his intended objectives. The paternalistic attitude toward the masses—seen as uneducated, vulnerable and too easily impressionable—which characterized the official discourse of the Catholic Church in general, and that of Bernard in particular, stumbled on increasing resistance in Luxembourgish society, which reached its peak during the 1970s in the context of the scandal surrounding *Quiet Days in Clichy*. Bernard's discourse on

cinema, censorship and the protection of the adult public no longer reached nor convinced a majority of Catholics.

The project to tame cinema according to the values and moral principles of Catholicism was doomed from the start. However, Bernard's unwavering and sincere engagement in favor of film was not without its positive and constructive effects in Luxembourg, both in the short and in the long term. Bernard left a legacy through the establishment of a Catholic-inspired art-house cinema; the admittedly biased but generally sincere and competent film education of the general public; the film clubs and his serious, knowledgeable and above all regular weekly film section in the major Catholic papers of the country.

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## 6 An Alternative Way of Moralizing Cinema

### Father Flipo's Remedy for the Catholic Church's Propaganda Failure in France (1945–1962)

*Mélisande Leventopoulos*

Apropos research on Catholics and the cinema, the case of France is central, complex and paradoxical. Indeed, France, which is officially recognized as the country that invented cinema and dominated the market until 1914, was the scene of a very early development of Catholic Action (groups of lay Catholics who were attempting to encourage a Catholic influence on society) in the field of cinema (see Introduction), in particular relating to exhibition, which lasted throughout the twentieth century. In spite of the relative decline of the industry, French cinema could have elevated the Catholic Church to a position similar to the one it adopted in the United States. However, Catholic imperialism in the field of the cinema in France seems to have failed to achieve the same results as it did in the United States. Catholic Action was not so effective in its impact on the French film industry itself, or at least not in a long-term, homogeneous manner. However, its effects are more visible with respect to the history of *cinéphilie* and the elaboration of critical judgment on film.<sup>1</sup> Attempting to understand Catholic moralization of cinema in France in terms of power relationships amounts to writing the history of a conservative utopia in which the means did not quite measure up to justifying the end. I have chosen to do this through the prism of a biography that is both original and characteristic, in which the contradictions reflect both the failures and the inventiveness of French Catholics in the field of cinema.

This chapter examines the unlikely role of Father Emmanuel Flipo SJ (1911–1993),<sup>2</sup> a Jesuit priest, in the construction of a cinematographic policy toward film professionals in the Catholic Church in France between 1945 and 1962. Drawing on research from the extensive Jesuit archives,<sup>3</sup> it aims to show how Flipo enabled a reappraisal of the local Catholic Church's ability to influence the French film industry. The Church's efforts to moralize cinema will be examined from two viewpoints: Flipo's understanding and practice of his ministry, and the Catholic Church's attitude towards the media in France. This policy of moralizing cinema is best understood when read within the context of the Catholic Church's cultural crusade and the contradictory approaches to film within the Church, which also included enthusiasm for the medium.

## THE LACK OF POWER OF THE FRENCH CHURCH IN THE FIELD OF CINEMA

At the time of the invention of the *Cinématographe Lumière* (1895), Catholics constituted a conservative and counter-revolutionary group inside the French Third Republic (1870–1940): the majority opposed the policy of secularism (the two main measures being the reform of the secular school system in the 1880s and the separation of the churches and the state in 1905) adopted by the republicans, whose aim was to secularize French society. However, in their struggle against state secularism and a diminished respect for the Church, Catholics quickly understood the evangelical potential of the emerging new media. Whereas the French Church had previously used the ‘magic lantern’ as a tool for explaining the Catholic faith,<sup>4</sup> its interest in cinema was mainly due to observing the medium’s social impact. From the first decade of the twentieth century, priests invested in projection equipment to entertain audiences, and some confessional film distribution networks were inaugurated before the First World War—so much so that the technical abilities developed by priests, combined with the political fallout of the separation between Church and state in 1905, put Catholics at the forefront of avant-garde mass culture.

As the founding member of the *Office catholique international du cinéma* (International Catholic Organization for Cinema, OCIC) in April 1928, France was the first country, after Belgium (see Chapter 15),<sup>5</sup> in which Catholics developed a national interest in cinema.<sup>6</sup> During the late 1920s, the newly established French *Comité catholique du cinéma* (Catholic Cinema Committee), which evolved to become the more ambitious *Centrale catholique du cinéma* (Catholic Cinema Steering Committee, both abridged in this chapter as CCC) in 1934, rejected the idea of cinema’s prohibition. Moreover, the CCC identified and set three priorities: informing Catholics with regard to the morality of films, purifying production in general and setting up a dialogue with the film industry. The first priority was the easiest to attain, and a moral rating of films was introduced in September 1927. The second priority of purification appeared to be the least attainable, especially since the separation of the Church and the state hindered any possible Catholic representation inside the national committee of censorship. Catholics accused the French government of ignoring the moral issue and believed that the easiest way to act was to approach the film industry directly. This project enjoyed initial success. In October 1928, during the first national Catholic Congress of Cinema, Mass was celebrated in the Church of La Madeleine in front of a large congregation. The Mass was celebrated by the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Dubois, who was also a partisan of the Church’s cinematographic action. Among those present were Charles Delac<sup>7</sup> and Léon Gaumont, who represented the top level of the French film industry. Some filmmakers (such as Julien Duvivier), critics (G. Michel Coissac, for instance) and actors (like the famous Albert Préjean) also attended the

ceremony. After this first success, the cinema Mass became a yearly event. But the collaboration between the CCC and the film industry remained superficial.

During the 1930s, Catholics never managed to build a French version of the American Legion of Decency (see Chapter 3). The Church policy turned its back on professionals in order to focus on Catholic reception. Since cinema theaters were thought to exert indirect pressure on the current production, film exhibition was increasingly considered to be the most appropriate way of tackling the whole “problem of cinema.”<sup>8</sup> Film, which had already been introduced within youth fellowships and other Christian associations from 1910 onward,<sup>9</sup> was systematically introduced in parochial venues. The number of projectors in Catholic hands during the interwar years still remains unknown. However, in 1928, there were at least 1500, principally located in northern France, and their number had certainly already increased by 1931. From 1933 onward, Catholic cinemas were organized in regional federations that took charge of the distribution of films. In order to impose a financial embargo on the films considered immoral and conversely to promote the decent and well-rated ones, this strategy relied on the general film market. So, from René Clair to Ernst Lubitsch, Catholics watched the same cultural products as the rest of the French audience. This is the reason why pro-Christian-value films, which nevertheless had existed since the first decade of the twentieth century, remained marginal. Unlike the Communists, who had already begun to involve themselves with film production before the Popular Front (1936–1938),<sup>10</sup> Catholics believed in the power of reception. However, even if the exhibition system had favored the emergence of a Catholic audience,<sup>11</sup> it was not viable in economic terms. Moreover, Catholic distribution was not organized well enough to succeed.

The Catholic Church’s failure to influence cinema became even more apparent during the Second World War. Despite the fact that Marshal Philippe Pétain’s authoritarian Vichy regime (1940–1944) appeared to be much friendlier to the Church and its believers compared to the past lay republic,<sup>12</sup> the institutional collaboration between the *Comité d’organisation de l’industrie cinématographique* (State Committee for the Organization of Cinema’s Industry, COIC, founded by Vichy) and the CCC was limited to a few agreements on censorship. In other words, the ideological osmosis with Pétain—who was also seeking to moralize the media<sup>13</sup>—was almost platonic, even if Catholics were constantly requesting a wider collaboration that was circumvented by the government. While the euphoria of France’s liberation opened new perspectives of thought and action for Catholics, the cinematographic power of the Church remained nonexistent at the rebirth of the republic. However, the late 1940s coincided with a great moment of discovery of cinema, carried along by the enthusiasm of the liberation for all kinds of culture. A number of priests and lay members, preoccupied with popular education and with the question of the spirituality of films rather than with rating, became involved in this field. The development of the

post-war French *cinéphile* movement encouraged some Catholics to applaud Claude Autant-Lara's sulfurous *Diable au corps* (*Devil in the Flesh*, 1947),<sup>14</sup> a film about adulterous love during the First World War, and also Roberto Rossellini's *Germania anno zero* (*Germany Year Zero*, 1949) in spite of the film's tragic ending with the suicide of the young boy.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the Catholic presence inside the world of cinema seemed less strategic even if exhibition continued to be the most important aspect of it. Left aside, the attribution of moral ratings remained in the hands of the CCC, whose instructions some believers chose not to follow. The development of Christian *cinéphilie* therefore led to the failure of any attempt to set up a Catholic cinema lobby. In this context, the approach of the film industry was as complicated as ever.

### THE INVENTION OF A NEW FORM OF ACTION

In 1945, Emmanuel Flipo, who had been wounded during the war, joined the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). While exploring his priestly vocation,<sup>16</sup> he began to take an active interest in cinema.<sup>17</sup> However, Flipo's arrival at the CCC was a pure coincidence helped by a relative. Father Jean Dewavrin, who had been nominated secretary of the CCC by the archbishop's council in 1946, also hailed from the same wealthy, industrial, Christian family in the region of Lille in northern France. At the CCC, Flipo started participating in film rating, which had not changed since the interwar years: the classification of films varied between rating 3 (meaning that the film could be seen by all)<sup>18</sup> and 5 (films unsuited for Christians), but the majority of films were classified for "adults" or for "adults with reservations" (rating 4). Flipo quickly judged the system unproductive and proposed a reform. First of all, he denounced the lack of a proper process for film assessment. The films were not even discussed among members of the CCC. On the contrary, they were only seen by one assessor, which, undoubtedly, raised the problem of subjectivity and personal prejudice. The social reception of the rating inside the Catholic world also preoccupied Flipo. He thought that Catholic militants lacked adequate training to understand the rating system. "We protect but we do not train," he remarked.<sup>19</sup> Second, Flipo attacked the "clericalism" of Dewavrin's perspective. He argued that the French Catholic Church was afraid of commitment and talked in favor of the introduction of lay members inside the CCC. And, last but not least, Flipo urged this institution to embrace "positive action" in favor of the rating system. His proposal also emphasized the Church's renewed investment in cinematographic action. For these reasons, Flipo developed the idea of splitting in two the structure that specialized in cinema: on the one hand, he planned to build a real "*centrale*" made up of firms; on the other hand, he intended to make the rating office independent.<sup>20</sup> However, this project was very ambitious, and the evidence suggests it was never under serious consideration by the CCC.

Around 1950, Flipo was also questioning on a more theoretical level the relevance of ministry and cinema. He recognized parallels between church services and cinema attendance as community gatherings, so much so that he thought cinema offered an opportunity to instruct its audience in ways similar to the Catholic faithful at Mass: “weekly predication that gathers millions of believers at the same class or at the same lay sermon.”<sup>21</sup> The Jesuit recognized a need for the Church to acknowledge and respond to the power of cinema, and even called for the Church to “baptize” cinema by becoming actively involved. He reasoned that the dangerous potential of the media to influence the masses justified this urgency.<sup>22</sup> As such, Flipo’s vision of cinema was conventional, especially since this idea of a moral antidote had been recurrent in Catholic circles since the beginning of the twentieth century. However, it is important to recognize the innovation insofar as Flipo was not so much complaining about what Catholics used to call “bad films” as asking priests to be more indulgent with the medium that he considered as an art in its infancy.<sup>23</sup> In his view, it was the duty of the clergy to attend screenings to realize the evangelical potential of cinema attendance.<sup>24</sup>

In an effort towards the “Christianization of cinema,” Flipo proposed a new and innovative approach. While he acknowledged a need to educate the Catholic public, something that would require considerable commitment from the institutional French Catholic Church, it seems it did not really concern him as a priority. In fact, we can reason that Flipo left this field to the Dominicans, who had already by that time created and developed the successful journal *Radio, cinéma, télévision* (created in 1950, and ‘baptized’ *Télérama* in 1960, a name that is still in use). Instead, and possibly influenced by another Jesuit, Father Jean Danel SJ, who argued a parallel between the French worker priests and the missionaries of cinema, Flipo asserted the need for a ministry reforming the cinema from the inside.<sup>25</sup> According to him, Catholics had to intervene directly in the making of films so as to surmount the rating problem. In short, his theory was to turn directly to the film industry, and was contrary to the established practice of prioritizing the development of Catholic cinemas. In spite of Flipo’s efforts, contact with professionals was hindered considerably since 75 percent of cinema technicians had joined the radical-left trade union *Confédération générale du travail* (General Confederation of Labor, CGT) in 1945, and were therefore positioning themselves against the Church.<sup>26</sup> This drove Flipo to develop more personal relationships within the film industry. His involvement in the creation of a cinema professionals’ union, the *Union catholique du cinéma* (Catholic Cinema Union, UCC) failed. This failure further strengthened Flipo’s conviction that it was necessary to foster personal relationships with individual filmmakers. Initially, he developed relationships as an informal spiritual guide for people working in the filmmaking business. One of them was the successful (and almost only) local Christian director, Maurice Cloche, who had directed the

hagiography *Monsieur Vincent* (1947), the most famous French Catholic film of all times about Vincent de Paul, a popular French saint known for his active charity during the seventeenth century. Continuing to act without approval from the Church's hierarchy, Flipo also turned to non-Catholic filmmakers such as Marcel Pagnol, whom he had met on several occasions.<sup>27</sup> His actual presence on shootings as religious adviser and the reading of scenarios complemented his religious influence. However, this in turn raises the question of whether his presence should be considered a form of religious precensorship, which, of course, affected a minority of French films. On the one hand, his spiritual influence during production appears as an informal, noninstitutional agreement made with the directors who wanted to open their films to the great cinema audience that the Catholic world constituted. On the other hand, however, this did not exclude moral and theologian control of content. Furthermore, Flipo became involved with the state's Film Control Commission through his friend Pierre Roustang, who had probably joined it himself in April 1950, when the Ministry of Information introduced a representative of family associations to the French Board of Censorship.<sup>28</sup> He was becoming progressively conscious of the censorship stake.

### THE FIRST STEP TOWARD A CONSENSUS: PROMOTING THE "BON FILM" INSIDE THE FRENCH CATHOLIC SPHERES

Personal contacts were insufficient for the institution of "norms of professional morality,"<sup>29</sup> so Flipo envisaged direct structural action. Between 1950 and 1954, he directed his priestly attention towards the distribution sector. Flipo had previously promoted Christian initiatives within the production sector, such as with the *Film spiritualiste* (Spiritualist Film), a short-lived production practice created in the 1940s about which no further information is available. However, the *Association de documentation et d'information cinématographique* (Cinema Documentation and Information Association, ADIC) that he launched in 1950 with Roustang appeared as a brand-new experience. This distribution company was based on the promotion of films approved by the CCC. Its founders intended to take advantage of existing films, as long as the aspiration to produce Christian films remained unachievable. From *Le petit monde de Don Camillo* (*The Little World of Don Camillo*, Julien Duvivier, 1952) to *Quo Vadis* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1953), the films chosen were judged acceptable for their moral values and, in the Catholic terminology of the day, for being "wholesome." Nevertheless, they were not Christian productions, even if they frequently dealt with religious topics. While the principle was to link economic profitability and the human values of films in the interests of the audience, the ultimate aim of this publicity was undoubtedly to keep immoral films out of the market.<sup>30</sup>

In an effort toward a consensus with the film industry, and within the context of a crisis in French cinema, the ADIC talked the language of producers. This approach acknowledged that producers needed an increased audience and that the ADIC would be able to encourage Catholic attendance. Some producers and distributors accepted the principle and financed the association from 1950 onward. Circa 1954, the association seemed to be working well, although its effectiveness must not be overestimated. ADIC promotion raised the receipts of films from 20 to 30 percent. A good example of success is the collaboration with Paramount that resulted in the ADIC handling the distribution of nine films. However, for French producers, it was not simply a distribution office. In fact, in 1955, 10 percent of French scenarios were being submitted by the producers to ensure the future promotion of their films by the association.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the ADIC permitted, at a certain level, the systematization of the Catholic influence on filmmaking. Films were launched in towns all over France, thanks to a network of correspondents relying on the Catholic press, local church committees, movements and schools.<sup>32</sup> On the whole, ADIC did not lean on the Catholic network of cinemas. On the contrary, its aim was to promote the films in cinemas with exclusive screening rights (*salles d'exclusivité*). Thanks to the militant network, it was also possible to establish contact with the theater owners, who could play a fundamental part in the moralization of cinema. In order to approach these professionals, the arguments were the same as for the producers. ADIC helped fill the venues so as to encourage them to keep screening "worthwhile" films. Consequently, from the reading of scripts to the projection of films, the ADIC system was complete, and Flipo concluded in 1962 that "film's economic aspect is more accessible to our action."<sup>33</sup>

In order to expand this action to the professionals who were not collaborating, Flipo launched a campaign for wholesome films within the CCC. Based on the social impact of the rating system, the goal was to negotiate decency for a bigger audience. In publications such as the *Annual Repertory of Films* (*Répertoire général des films*), Flipo gave his take on the morality bias of each distributor. He also demonstrated that wholesome films were generally preferred by larger audiences. Flipo's policy is likely to have been approved by Cardinal Feltin as archbishop of Paris, even though there is no correspondence between the two men in the archives. There is, however, evidence of Feltin's becoming involved directly: first in January 1952, and for a second time in October of the same year, when the archbishop addressed the professionals on their responsibility concerning "good" and "bad" films. Catholics were, according to Feltin, as ready as ever to support professionals and were relying on them in order to be able to go with their "eyes wide open" to watch films.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the pope himself took part in this pressure on the film industry when he addressed the Italian professionals on the "ideal film" in June 1955. Was Pius XII influenced by the activities in France? It is difficult to tell, but during the period 1952–1955, there

was undoubtedly a professional trend inside the Catholic world that helped Flipo acquire a central place inside the system. Finally in 1955, he was officially nominated religious adviser of the CCC, which had been extended to television.

## TOWARD A NEW COMPROMISE

While he continued to consider the various aspects of “positive action” within the CCC (work on scenarios, contacts with filmmakers, etc.), Flipo endeavored to create groups of Christian professionals in 1957. In the first place, this opened for him the possibility to interfere more directly in economic factors at a time when his activity inside the ADIC had to be more discrete, given its commercial implications.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the specialized bishops’ commission in media, which spoke in the name of the hierarchy, was more afraid than ever of confusing Catholic Action with commercial structures. In the second place, this new form of action looked like a solution halfway between the trade union and the individual level of contact he had experienced with filmmakers in the early 1950s. The collective aspect, however, seemed stimulated by the Encyclical Letter *Miranda prorsus* of 1957, in which Pius XII reexamined the professional issue (see Introduction). The distributors’ group became the most successful one and gathered together representatives of the ten or fifteen most important French firms.<sup>36</sup> With Roger Sallard<sup>37</sup> from Gaumont as its head, the group—even if it recognized itself as Catholic—was critical (as indeed were all professionals) of the rating system. However, Flipo, as chaplain of the group, played the part of an arbiter, thanks to his increasingly distanced view of the rating.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, the group of distributors was developing a corporate spirit in regard to Christian cinema owners. The former accused the latter of favoring films with a greater commercial potential to the detriment of potentially less profitable films that met with the approval of the CCC.<sup>39</sup> In other words, for the distributors, the Catholic cinemas’ program planners were thought to have only one criterion of selection, the moral one. Consequently, Catholic cinema owners, who, of course, needed films that were attractive to a wide audience, felt misrepresented.<sup>40</sup> While Flipo was more nuanced than the distributors because of his official functions, he nonetheless neglected the Catholic cinema owners. According to him, they symbolized the closed Christian community that was completely separated from the film industry.

On the contrary, Flipo evidently still believed in the possible influence he could have on French society, thanks to his relationship with film suppliers. Moreover, Flipo was now explicitly expressing the wish to pay attention to the 90 percent of the audience who did not go to the Catholic cinemas.<sup>41</sup> This is certainly why he accepted the game that distributors played with him in regard to the rating system.<sup>42</sup> He suggested



the Catholic hierarchy, which was reconfiguring the CCC into an office (*Office catholique français du cinéma*, French Catholic Cinema Office, OCFC), to officially include these professionals in this new organization. However, René Stourm, president of the Bishops' Media Commission, showed preference to the Catholic cinema owners. In fact, the latter supported Pierre d'André, Flipo's enemy within the CCC. Aside from being an anecdote, the disagreement between these two men is interesting, as it personifies the radical divergences of Catholic film policy in France. Pierre d'André was involved in the cultural sector (which had a direct impact on the daily life of the dioceses) and intended to focus from 1956 onward on the new office's action on the education of Catholic spectators. Conversely, Flipo was too out of line with the new Catholic conception of cinema's collective function and could not be understood by the average Catholic spectator. According to him, the Church's potential influence on the French cinema industry implied putting an end to focusing on the exhibition network. This context of conflict between the inside action and the outward apostolate certainly explains the tensions leading to Flipo's dismissal in 1962.<sup>43</sup> However, although several documents on the subject are found in the Jesuit archives, much about his dismissal remains rather mysterious: indeed, in February 1962, Stourm contacted Flipo's immediate superior and asked him to request Flipo to resign as consultant of the OCFC without giving any reasons for this.<sup>44</sup>

### AN EPHEMERAL PARTNERSHIP WITH THE FRENCH STATE IN THE NAME OF PROFESSION

Before leaving the OCFC, Flipo was the architect of a major Catholic political victory within the cinematographic field, namely the ephemeral partnership with the French state in the name of profession. General de Gaulle's return to power in 1958 coincided with the first developments of television in France (that is to say, the beginning of cinema's recession) and the arrival of the New Wave. While the new government envisaged the reorganization of film censorship demanded by some professionals, the moral crusade provoked by the release of Roger Vadim's adaptation of Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' eighteenth-century erotic novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (*Dangerous Reasons*) in September 1959 constituted a strategic opportunity for the OCFC. While the film was locally contested by family associations seeking, and frequently obtaining, its banning by local councils,<sup>45</sup> the Ministry of Information, hurried on by this right-wing panic, embarked upon a wide consultation on the censorship reform and addressed, among others, the Catholic Church. Written by Flipo, the OCFC's answer to the president of the inquiry commission set up by the ministry tried to negotiate local council bans against Catholic support for

“a more steady organization of the film profession.” He claimed the necessity of preventive control of films:

We could go even further and recommend censorship not only before screening but also before shooting, for the same reasons. That is to say, it is harmful for the film industry to have a film banned when it has cost a hundred million to make. However, if national censorship does not play its role correctly, we will not defend films from the repressive censorship that they deserve, as the moral protection of the public is more important than the financial interest of the film industry.<sup>46</sup>

This project of film supervision, which was conceived stage by stage from censorship cuts to age admission, did not convince the ministry.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, during the first months of 1960, the OCFC continued to support family associations’ struggle. However, dealings with the ministry continued and, on March 22, led to the publication of an official statement on the “growing immorality of a number of French film productions.” The statement was written by Flipo for the archbishop’s council in an attempt to apply pressure to the inquiry commission.<sup>48</sup>

A novel situation arose from sending this “determined appeal to the consciences of all those who have responsibilities in this field” to the members of parliament in April, along with a letter from Dewavrin and a copy of the Catholic project for the reform of censorship.<sup>49</sup> The OCFC subsequently and officiously assumed more responsibilities at a central level than it had in fact been granted under the Vichy regime. The conception of the new advance on earnings system was influenced by its demands, but what is even more significant is that the reaction reveals a desire to satisfy the Church. For example, *Dialogue des Carmélites* (*Dialogue of the Carmelites*, Agostini and Bruckberger, 1960)—based on a play by Georges Bernanos and a long-standing project of the Dominican priest Léopold Bruckberger, in which Dewavrin was involved and which was completed in 1959—was one of the first films to benefit from the new system.<sup>50</sup> This privileged status enabled Flipo and the members of the OCFC to envisage for a short time in 1960 and 1961 a concrete reinvestment in French cinema beyond the field of the commission of control in the name of the expertise of the Catholic community. This was achieved by reinforcing the precensorship system by establishing a service for re-reading scenarios and advising on shootings, which, of course, had already existed in the past within the office, but to a lesser degree. This enabled the OCFC, readily accepted by quite a number of producers,<sup>51</sup> to dialogue with willing filmmakers, in particular with Jean-Pierre Melville, who was on the point of adapting Beatrix Beck’s novel *Léon Morin, prêtre* (*Léon Morin, Priest*, 1952) for the cinema. Therefore, Church intervention in the area of cinema industry, as normalized by this late measure of institutionalization, now constituted part of a partnership with the

state that was made official at the beginning of the 1960s. However, this partnership became less visible with the dismissal of Flipo from the office.

## CONCLUSION

With Flipo's dismissal, the idea of an alternative policy in cinema was temporarily rejected. Paradoxically, at the time of the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) (see Introduction and Chapter 2), the French Church was becoming less tolerant toward its own experimental initiatives, even though the dialogue with professionals resonated with the council's call for the Church to engage with the world. The conservative but heterodox position of Flipo, who was more a coordinator than a real leader, led to his receiving no subsequent recognition within the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, thanks to his cinema action, he tried to introduce a balance in favor of moral values. Furthermore, Flipo played the role of what pragmatic sociology calls a "moral entrepreneur" (see Introduction).<sup>52</sup> After his dismissal, the Church's official action for the moralization of cinema was only possible via the Commission of Censorship, where a narrow-minded priest, Jean Pihan, sat as a representative of educators. For the Catholic office, there was now no way to communicate with professionals. This new impenetrable frontier explains partly the scandal of Jacques Rivette's *La Religieuse* (*The Nun*) in 1965–1966. Indeed, the OCFC, reinforced by the cinematographic alliance set up at the beginning of the decade, orchestrated the controversy about the film before it was even shot because it was unable to propose any agreement to Georges de Beauregard's production team, even though its scenario was submitted at various times to the Catholic experts.<sup>53</sup>

Appointed as secretary of information at the OCIC,<sup>54</sup> Flipo was able to follow up on his efforts to establish a new compromise with the film industry outside the OCFC during the 1960s. His perspective was turned toward the launching of films more than ever. Some French professionals who Flipo had known for a long time, such as Roger Sallard and Jean-Charles Edeline, were mobilized. Besides, Flipo now had the opportunity to engage in a concrete dialogue with various professionals, thanks largely to his presence at a diverse mix of festivals. Through totally secular and informal groups, he tried in various ways to redefine Catholic judgment criteria<sup>55</sup> and how to discuss the presence of God inside cinema.<sup>56</sup> Thus, his position was strengthened. Despite the fact that Flipo was quickly marginalized in the early 1970s, his influence on the cinema apostolate was reinforced by the nomination of Father René Berthier as secretary of the French Catholic Cinema Office in 1968. Berthier, who was more a man of the press than a cinema missionary, approached the moralization topic in the same way as Flipo. He intended to get close to the media's elite and to collaborate with the heads of the larger studios. Moreover, he was conscious of the social rating problem: after the social shake-up of May 1968,

it was unrealistic to impose prohibitions on the Christian community that had taken an active part in the movement.<sup>57</sup> So Berthier reformed the system of film assessment, and was certainly helped by Flipo who was still the most faithful rater. This final stage in his career seemed to be a new breath of air for the Jesuit priest, but it ended with the crisis of pornography in 1975. Indeed, the development of the erotic production in the context of liberalization of the Board of Censorship provoked a religious retraction that definitively put an end to the utopian dream of moralizing cinema inside the French Church.

## NOTES

1. Leventopoulos, Mélisande. 2015. *Les catholiques et le cinéma: la construction d'un regard critique (France, 1895–1958)*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes.
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3. French Archives of the Society of Jesus, referred to here as AFSJ. The archive is located in Vanves, a suburb of Paris.
4. André, Jacques and André, Marie. 1992. "Le rôle des projections lumineuses dans la pastorale catholique française" in Roland Cosandey, André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning, eds., *Une invention du diable ? Cinéma des premiers temps et religion*. Lausanne/Sainte-Foy: Payot/Laval University Press, 44–60. Saint-Martin, Isabelle. 2003. *Voir, savoir, croire. Catéchismes et pédagogie par l'image au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 280.
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6. Vezyroglou, Dimitri. "Les catholiques, le cinéma et la conquête des masses: le tournant de la fin des années 1920." *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* no 51, (2004): 128.
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8. Jalabert, Louis. "Les catholiques et le problème du cinéma." *Études* 197, no 23 (December 1928): 549.
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12. Fouilloux, Etienne, 1997. *Les chrétiens français entre crise et libération 1937–1947*. Paris: Seuil, 105.
13. Bertin-Maghit, Jean-Pierre. 2002. *Le cinéma sous l'Occupation. Le monde du cinéma français de 1940 à 1946*. Paris: Perrin, 90.
14. The dates in brackets correspond to the French release dates of the films mentioned.

15. Leventopoulos, Mélanide. "Une Église moderne en images: la cause cinématographique du père Pichard," 1895, *Revue d'histoire du cinéma*, no 63 (Spring 2011): 70–89. Leventopoulos, Mélanide. 2012. "D'André Bazin à Amédée Ayfre, les circulations du personnelisme dans la cinéphilie chrétienne." *Contextes*, no 12 (September 2012). See <http://contextes.revues.org/5513>.
16. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Texte de vocation." AFSJ, Flipo 2 (1944).
17. In 1946, Flipo was appointed secretary of the French Jesuit's sector for cinema. Letter from Emmanuel Flipo to Father Jean. AFSJ, Flipo 2 (August 1946).
18. The ratings 1 and 2, which concerned films suitable for children and parochial houses in the 1930s, had disappeared from the classification after the Second World War.
19. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Rapport du père Flipo à ses supérieurs sur le cinéma en France." AFSJ, I Pa 987 (October 1950).
20. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Note." AFSJ, Flipo 1 (May 1950).
21. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Le problème du cinéma et la Compagnie," AFSJ, I Pa 987 (November 1950).
22. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Note." AFSJ, Flipo 1 (May 1950).
23. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Cinéma, pédagogie et culture." AFSJ, I Pa 987.
24. Flipo advised priests to go especially to Paris's biggest film theaters: "They should even attend those popular celebrations at screenings for audiences of five thousands every evening at the Gaumont Palace, be one among the many in local cinemas where people laugh wholeheartedly at Charlie Chaplin's antics or Noël-Noël's repartee, appreciate the aesthetic pleasure in luxurious seats in an exclusive cinema among other aesthetes and join in their applause" (translation by the author). Flipo, Emmanuel. "Cinéma, pédagogie et culture." AFSJ, I Pa 987.
25. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Le prêtre d'aujourd'hui et le cinéma." AFSJ, I Pa 987.
26. Montebello, Fabrice. 2005. *Le cinéma en France*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2005, 39.
27. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Note." AFSJ, Flipo 1 (May 1950).
28. On the French Board of Censorship, see Garreau, Laurent. 2009. *Archives secrètes du cinéma français 1945–1975*. Paris: PUF, 2009, and Hervé, Frédéric. 2012. *Les enfants du Cinématographe et d'Anastasie. La censure cinématographique et la jeunesse en France 1945–1975*. Doctoral thesis, University of Paris 1.
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31. "Le travail de l'ADIC." *Répertoire général des films 1954–1955*. Lyon: Pensée vraie (1955): 29–30.
32. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Rapport du père Flipo à ses supérieurs sur le cinéma en France." AFSJ, I Pa 987 (October 1950); "Qu'est-ce que l'ADIC ?" *Répertoire général des films 1953–1954*. Lyon: Pensée vraie (1954): 33–44.
33. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Note sur les rapports avec les professionnels du cinéma" [Paper at the Jesuit international conference on cinema and television]. New York (July 1962).
34. Feltin, Maurice. 1955. "Discours aux professionnels du cinéma (October 1952)" in Commission pontificale pour le cinéma, la radio, la télévision ed., *Le cinéma dans l'enseignement de l'Eglise*. Vatican: Libreria editrice vaticana, 370.
35. CCC. "Réunion de la sous-commission épiscopale cinéma-radio-télévision." APDF (Archives of the French Dominican Province, Paris), V 802 8 58 (November 1955).
36. AFSJ, Flipo 2, Report, January 1958.
37. Roger Sallard worked for Gaumont from 1941 to 1975. He was president of the *Société nouvelle des établissements Gaumont* (New Gaumont Society, SNEG) from 1971 to 1975.

38. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Rapport d'activité." AFSJ, Flipo 2 (October 1958).
39. Thollon, Marcel. "Exposé du groupe des distributeurs catholiques concernant les relations avec les circuits de salles familiales équipées en 16 mm." APDF, V 802 9 67 8 (December 1957).
40. Letter from Jean-Claude Didier to Flipo, AFSJ, Flipo 2 (March 1957).
41. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Note sur l'apostolat dans le domaine du cinéma." AFSJ, Flipo 2 (August 1961).
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43. "Protocole d'accord concernant les activités du RP Flipo à la CCRT et à l'OCIC." AFSJ, Flipo 1 (April 1962).
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46. Translation by the author. Flipo, Emmanuel. "Réponse de l'OCFC à la commission d'enquête et d'études sur la réforme de la réglementation du contrôle des films cinématographiques." CNAEF (French Church National Archives Center), 98 CE 25 (December 1959).
47. Letter from Emmanuel Flipo to Jacques Ménager. CNAEF, 2 CE 1008 (January 1960).
48. "Note sur le cinéma." CNAEF, 15 CO 2 (March 1960).
49. Letter from Jean Dewavrin to the Members of Parliament. CNAEF, 2 CE 1008 (April 1960).
50. Gimello-Mesplomb, Frédéric. 1997. *La politique de financement du cinéma français de 1960 à 1965. De la Nouvelle Vague à l'entretien d'un cinéma d'évasion ?* Master's dissertation, University of Toulouse.
51. "Compte-rendu de la séance de la sous-commission épiscopale du cinéma, de la radio et de la télévision." CNAEF, 15 CO 2 (October 1962).
52. Mathieu, Lilian. 2009. "Les croisades morales" in Olivier Filleule, Lilian Mathieu, and Cécile Péchu, eds. *Dictionnaire des mouvements sociaux*. Paris: SciencesPo, 172.
53. Berthet, Frédérique. 1993. *L'interdiction de Suzanne Simonin la Religieuse de Diderot. Aspects d'une affaire*. Master's dissertation, University of Grenoble, 53.
54. The job as secretary of information at the OCIC was created in June 1960 for Flipo—that is to say, before his official eviction from the OCFC. In 1959, he had taken charge of the French edition of the *Revue internationale du cinéma*, which, created after the war, was OCIC's organ. About Flipo's career at OCIC, see Bonneville, Leo. 1998. *OCIC Soixante-dix ans au service de l'audiovisuel*. Québec: Fides, 243.
55. "Table ronde sur le cinéma réunie à l'invitation de la commission audiovisuelle de la compagnie de Jésus," AFSJ, Fourvière, QLY 524 3 (June 1966).
56. Léo Bonneville, *op. cit.*
57. Pelletier, Denis. 2002. *La crise catholique*. Paris: Payot.

## 7 A Triple Alliance for a Catholic Neorealism

Roberto Rossellini According to  
Félix Morlion, Giulio Andreotti  
and Gian Luigi Rondi

*Elena Dagrada*

There is no doubt that the inspirational task of Christianity in the field of motion pictures will be of immense importance in post-war reconstruction.<sup>1</sup>

(Félix A. Morlion)

In a book of memories about the USSR, the Italian Christian Democratic politician Giulio Andreotti recalls his first encounter with the Belgian Dominican Father Félix Morlion:

In February 1944, in full German occupation, a Dominican priest with a foreign accent and a large ruddy face, pretty rare in that dietary difficult time, asked to see De Gasperi. He said he came from the USA and was bearer of a signed letter by don Luigi Sturzo, from Jacksonville in Florida [. . .]. Sturzo presented *to his dear Alcide* “Father Morlion, a great friend of us and of our Belgian friends’ ideas, who is doing here an excellent job with the Center Pro Deo and can be of great help not only to us in Italy but also to all our friends in other countries.”<sup>2</sup>

In all likelihood, Andreotti confuses one month for another. Correspondence shows that Morlion (see Chapters 10 and 15) was still in the United States in February 1944. First, there is the correspondence between Morlion and the Italian Catholic priest and anti-Fascist politician Luigi Sturzo, who had been in exile in the United Kingdom and later, during the Second World War, in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Second, a later letter written by Sturzo, dated May 4, 1944, shows how the spiritual father of Italian Christian Democracy asked Earl Brennan (chief of the OSS Italian Sector in Washington, D.C.) to help Morlion obtain an exit permit and a visa to leave the United States for Italy.<sup>4</sup> In the following lines, however, Andreotti clearly grasps at least three definite peculiarities of the Belgian priest. First: in spite of an air of mystery, his evangelizing exuberance was brimming over. Second: he was the inventor of an original didactic methodology, which was opposite to

the traditional Italian one; while he appreciated academic professors, he preferred young teachers for his Pro Deo activities and looked for relationships with “others.”<sup>5</sup> Third: he showed a great consideration for cinema—an important medium and a delicate milieu in which his exuberant behavior ultimately upset the ecclesiastical hierarchies.

Certainly, in August 1944, Morlion was on his way to Europe. And in September 1944, he was already in Rome.<sup>6</sup> Here, among other things, he arrived ready to lavish his evangelizing exuberance and to import his original didactic methodology, which he would also apply to cinema. His specialty was in mass propaganda and directing public opinion. He surely knew Walter Lippmann’s book *Public Opinion*, which was published in 1922.<sup>7</sup> He had himself already published on the subject, mostly notably *The Apostolate of Public Opinion*.<sup>8</sup> Above all, Morlion knew very well that public opinion could be better directed through media like radio and film. He had been active in cinema since the 1930s in Belgium, where in 1930–1931 he had founded *Documentation Cinématographique de la Presse* (DOCIP), a press service that specialized in film topics and worked in conjunction with *Office Catholique International du Cinéma* (OCIC) (see Chapters 1 and 15). In the United States, he had created the international press service INTERCIP (often referred to as CIP, i.e., the Center of Information Pro Deo), which he planned to introduce to Italy too.

Public opinion was important in post-war Italy. After liberation, in June 1946 Italians chose by referendum to end the monarchy in favor of becoming a republic. This brought about profound political and cultural changes in Italian society, due to the need to create a democratic country. On the one hand, the following years were dedicated to reconstruction and to pacification efforts by successive coalition governments, while a constituent assembly wrote the Italian constitution (which came into force on January 1, 1948). On the other hand, this era of transition was characterized by the great mobilization generated by the first parliamentary elections of the new-born Italian republic in April 1948, which reflected how Italy was already embroiled in a Cold War tangle. Italy was strategically important as a nation, politically and geographically, and its restored democratic election outcomes were important for both the United States and the USSR, as well as for an inside state such as the Vatican.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the outcome of this first parliamentary post-war election was uncertain, because in the 1946 elections of the constituent assembly, the Socialists and Communists ran separately, but together, they had the majority of votes. Since in 1948 they ran a joint election campaign, this further increased Catholic concerns about Communism.<sup>10</sup> It was in this climate of fear that Morlion founded in Rome the *Istituto Internazionale Pro Deo*,<sup>11</sup> which from November 15, 1947, onward published *L’ora dell’azione*, a propaganda magazine conceived in view of the April 1948 elections.<sup>12</sup> After the Christian Democracy’s victory, the institute was transformed into the *Università Internazionale di Studi Sociali Pro Deo*,<sup>13</sup> which included the first academic cinematographic department.<sup>14</sup>





*Figure 7.1* Giulio Andreotti and Father Félix Morlion at Pro Deo (1948).

*Source:* Author's personal archive.

In addition, public opinion about Italy was important, especially internationally. Indeed, this was a main preoccupation for people like Sturzo and Morlion, as is proven in their correspondence with each other, as well as by the specific studies conducted by CIP.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the United Nations' attitude towards a defeated Italy could be strategically modulated, taking into account the extenuating circumstances of a population perceived as not guilty of, or as less guilty of, Fascism than the Nazi Germans or Japanese.

Then, *Roma città aperta* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945) and *Paisà* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946) were released. Or better: their international fame mushroomed and even was more efficacious in promoting positive international opinion about Italy, obtaining better and faster what secret services

had been planning for years. To that effect, neorealism<sup>16</sup> became the best ambassador of the Italian boot. It acquitted Italians from blame and conveyed resistance by showing the everyday heroism of an innocent, suffering population.

Italian Catholics were hostile towards neorealism because it was considered near to the left.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, neorealism was the most important cultural phenomenon in post-war Italy. Morlion saw this for himself at the Brussels *Festival mondial du film et des beaux-arts*, in June 1947,<sup>18</sup> when the Belgian government awarded a prize to *Paisà* and the OCIC jury presented its Gran Prix to *Vivere in pace* (Luigi Zampa, 1946).

Also in June 1947 in Brussels, Morlion met film director Roberto Rossellini, and by Morlion's own recollection, he began collaborating with him about a year later in Venice, in September 1948.<sup>19</sup> Between 1947 and 1948, three important things occurred. First, Giulio Andreotti was designated undersecretary to the presidency to the Council of Ministers with a mandate for Entertainment, the equivalent of a ministry, previously nonexistent at that time.<sup>20</sup> Second, Christian Democracy won the April 1948 elections. And third, Ingrid Bergman wrote to Roberto Rossellini.

Fifteen years younger than Morlion, Andreotti had been one of the first collaborators with the Italian CIP on the Dominican side. He met Morlion through Alcide De Gasperi, the founder of the Christian Democracy party who would be the Italian prime minister in eight successive coalition governments from 1945 to 1953. Andreotti started his role on June 4, 1947, and kept the Entertainment mandate from the fourth De Gasperi government (May 31, 1947) to the end of the Pella government (January 12, 1954). Unlike Morlion, he had never been particularly interested in cinema, except for censorship and control possibilities;<sup>21</sup> besides, the entertainment mandate was just one of his many other positions. From the beginning, however, he was deeply aware of the importance of his thorny assignment.

The Christian Democratic victory in 1948 strengthened Andreotti, who soon strove to increase the Catholic influence on cinema's activities, most notably through production control and the expansion of parish cinemas.<sup>22</sup> Importantly, he adhered to Morlion's policy to reclaim neorealism praise from the monopoly of left criticism and to Christianize what international film critics called the "new Italian cinematographic school." According to Morlion, this school could no longer be ignored by Italian Catholics. He wrote about it explicitly in June 1948 in the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia's* magazine *Bianco e Nero*,<sup>23</sup> asserting that foreign Catholic critics reacted with instinctive sympathy for Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* and *Paisà*, and for the "neorealist Italian school."<sup>24</sup> A few months later, Andreotti wrote the same. Unofficially, Andreotti wrote it in a letter to Giovanni Battista Montini<sup>25</sup> dated November 9, 1948. Officially, in a speech pronounced on November 27, 1948, and subsequently published in

December in *Bianco e Nero*,<sup>26</sup> he wrote that it was impossible to ignore the “neoveristic cinematographic school,” despite how its traits and features were difficult at times to embrace. That school was too greatly appreciated abroad, where it honored Italy; and therefore, it would be better to promote a sane, very moral production, which can worthily belong to that school and enrich it with spiritual values.

Even if Ingrid Bergman hadn’t written to Rossellini, entering his life and films so strongly, he probably would still have been the most consequent choice as the “pioneer [. . .] of Catholic neorealism, correcting the other one which did not seem Christian enough.”<sup>27</sup> Rossellini made neorealism famous in the world with *Roma città aperta* and *Paisà* (the latter produced with American money, which also proved his reliability). Both films depicted positive examples of priests and were able to impress Catholic critics internationally. Moreover, he was not a Communist;<sup>28</sup> in fact, he was considered by many as being close to the Christian Democracy party.<sup>29</sup> Rossellini was actually a filmmaker who was difficult to classify: he had left Fascism for resistance;<sup>30</sup> he was close to Communists like Sergio Amidei and Giorgio Amendola;<sup>31</sup> but he also attended Christian Democracy meetings.<sup>32</sup> According to Morlion’s “original methodology,” all this made Rossellini the best person to convert neorealism to Christianity. Would Rossellini be a clerical director, he could arouse suspicion, like those excessively biased films that make spectators diffident. Rossellini’s pictures, on the contrary, dealt with social matters within emotional stories.<sup>33</sup>

However, as a famous film star with an international following, Ingrid Bergman was a guarantee for a wide audience, larger than the ones already gained by *Roma città aperta* and *Paisà*. She represented an opportunity, and not only for Rossellini.

When he received her letter, in May 1948, Rossellini found himself in a difficult position. *Germania anno zero*—shot in Berlin and Rome in 1947—had been halted by censorship,<sup>34</sup> and *L’amore*—a diptych composed by *Una voce umana* and *Il miracolo*—would not be greeted as hoped, particularly because of its second part.<sup>35</sup> Rossellini entered it in the 1948 Venice Festival, where it won no prizes. Even Morlion, appointed by Andreotti as a member of the jury,<sup>36</sup> judged its “religious inspiration”<sup>37</sup> as being mistaken. Nonetheless, contextually, the Dominican “accepted” to elaborate on the “religious theme” of Rossellini’s next film. Or—more probably—Rossellini “accepted” Morlion’s helping hand, since he realized how much the disapproval of the Catholic milieu cost, both in Venice and later, when the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico* (CCC) excluded both *Germania anno zero* and *L’amore* from parish cinemas. The leftist milieu had also abandoned Rossellini, accusing him of betraying neorealism and deserting choral and social film in favor of an introspective turn labeled “involution.”<sup>38</sup> In a way, Rossellini had no choice.



*Figure 7.2* Father Morlion (here with Jean Cocteau) during the Venice Film Festival in 1948.

*Source:* Author's personal archive.

Rossellini's next film was *Stromboli*, starring Ingrid Bergman. Despite Morlion's claim that he elaborated its "religious theme" before Rossellini met the actress,<sup>39</sup> the first draft of the plot was in fact dated May 1948, i.e., before Morlion "accepted" to elaborate it. Rossellini sent it to Bergman shortly after receiving her letter. It describes a "tall, blond stranger" (later named Karin) confined in a displaced persons' camp near Rome, who marries a Sicilian fisherman to remain in Italy and follows him to his volcanic island. She thought she could find salvation, but the savage island, shaken by the volcano, rejects her, and the black sulfurous sea impedes her to escape; so she hopes for a miracle, without realizing that something has already happened. She finally understands the power of those who possess nothing, the lure of freedom, and becomes a sort of Saint Francis. In this early draft, the only reference to God is the Lutheran protagonist's cultural differences with respect to the Catholic islanders. Namely, it is in tune with Rossellini's basic idea of the contrast between a stranger and her hostile environment, engendering a strong feeling of difference and exclusion.

Only in the second draft, dated November 6, 1948, and written with Morlion's collaboration, is the "religious theme" shaped. Here, the protagonist mends her ways when a sudden revelation of God helps her discover her faith after a night on the volcano. In the end, she returns to the village with

her husband: a solution that respects the indissolubility of the sacrament of marriage, and is retained in the RKO version of the film.<sup>40</sup> Another possible suggestion by Morlion is the introduction in the plot of a parish priest and the celebration of the marriage in a church, instead of in a small camp office. It is highly likely that Morlion also suggested quite early on the title he would succeed in imposing on the Italian version: at the end of September 1948, Ingrid Bergman wrote to a friend that she heard from Mr. Rossellini “that his proposed film now had a title, *Terra di Dio, God’s Earth*.”<sup>41</sup>

In any case, the whole treatment of the story was affected by the Dominican’s collaboration.<sup>42</sup> In fact, draft after draft outline two main nuclei: a melodramatic one, centered on a cultural conflict between Karin and the environment; and a mystic-religious one, centered on a spiritual conflict between Karin and God. The RKO version accentuated the first conflict, downplaying as much as possible the second one. Notably, the other two versions—especially the Italian one—developed the spiritual conflict underscoring Morlion’s religious theme, conceived to Christianize neorealism and use cinema in order to promote Christian ideals in public life. The potential success justified the effort: the film was expected to be released during the Holy Year, and Ingrid Bergman was supposed to guarantee its appeal to the general public.<sup>43</sup>

But scandal was lurking. The relationship between the director and the actress—both married to someone else—soon became an international breaking-news story. And when Morlion tried to organize a meeting with Pope Pius XII, on occasion of the Italian release of *Joan of Arc* (Victor Fleming, 1948) starring Ingrid Bergman, the news of her pregnancy messed everything up.<sup>44</sup> Morlion also was caught up in the scandal, especially through the US press, and in February 1950, he issued a statement through the CIP. In clarifying his position, he affirmed that the religious value of art has always been recognized as being independent of the artist’s behavior, as is testified by art history.<sup>45</sup> About one month later, on April 4, 1950, Andreotti repeated the same arguments during a parliamentary point of order by Alberto Consiglio,<sup>46</sup> who asked whether the case might be to defend Rossellini against the slanders made by the American senator Edwin C. Johnson. On March 12, *Stromboli* received the Rome Prize for Cinema, a governmental award negotiated inside Christian Democracy. Thus, in his acceptance speech, Andreotti also underlined its symbolic importance, since the film was championed at the same time that the American Senate attacked his director,<sup>47</sup> which proved that Italy was right to put art first. What Andreotti did not say, however, is that De Gasperi had expressly asked that Rossellini be prevented from appearing at the award ceremony because his presence would embarrass him.<sup>48</sup>

The Rome Prize jury included, among others, Gian Luigi Rondi,<sup>49</sup> who officially came into action on this occasion, but had been unofficially active since Ingrid Bergman’s arrival in Italy. Almost three years younger than Andreotti, he was close to both the undersecretary and Morlion.<sup>50</sup> His task was to promote *Stromboli*’s relished exegesis and to present or review the

picture through various media, sometimes without name, sometimes with his own or others' names (including, later, Rossellini's name).<sup>51</sup> In spite of the film not yet being released and that it only had been seen by the critics,<sup>52</sup> the Rome Prize generated considerable interest and flattering reviews. This was, however, a temporary success, and one that would not be repeated.

Indeed, at the 1950 Venice Festival, *Stromboli* was presented out of competition on August 26, the same day as Rossellini's *Francesco giullare di Dio*, which prompted the press to "baptize" this as "Rossellini day." The print's dialogue was in English, but the film was presented with the title planned for the Italian version *Stromboli terra di Dio*, with a press release in English that focused on the religious contents and translated the title as "*Stromboli* (God's Earth)."<sup>53</sup> Everything was orchestrated to concentrate critics' attention on the centrality of the religious theme of the two last Rossellini's films (which both had 'God' in their title). Yet, the Catholic critical reception was conflicted. If left-wing critics spoke about involution, further compromised by clerical involvement and inspiration, then some Catholic critics appeared dissatisfied and even more punctilious in expressing their reservations. Notably, the miraculous end and Karin's conversion were judged too quick and devoid of sufficient psychological motivation. On August 30, Piero Regnoli wrote in the Vatican daily *L'Osservatore Romano* that Karin's redemption, handled in "five minutes of hasty shots," represented the falsest aspect of the picture, along with a simplistic happy ending, which was often criticized by "who today wants to sustain the pretense spirituality of the final miracle."

Rondi was the one "who today wants to sustain the pretense spirituality of the filmic miracle." Three days earlier, on August 27, 1950, he openly praised *Stromboli*'s miraculous ending in the daily *Il Tempo*, making the Regnoli's remark on *L'Osservatore Romano* sound like a disavowal, even sharper because it referred to a picture endorsed by an important part of the Catholic world, including the well-known Father Morlion. This comment was not even without its consequences. In the Italian version, distributed months later,<sup>54</sup> the end was changed in response to Regnoli's criticism<sup>55</sup> and contained additional footage shot to correct the quickness of Karin's conversion.<sup>56</sup> Many years later, Morlion stated that he had personally shot these new frames—even if Rondi probably collaborated in their conception<sup>57</sup>—showing Karin invoking God for some peace. Positioned between her most extreme desperation and her awakening in the dawning light, these frames are easily recognizable, thanks to the tidiness of Bergman's hair, her freshly ironed garment and her clean handkerchief. But on the occasion of its Italian release, critics—including Catholics—ignored these changes and repeated the same judgment already expressed in Venice.

Yet, the Italian version was really modified in order to underline Morlion's religious theme, which relegated the islanders and nature to a "chorus role" (as in Greek tragedy) and conferred to God the role of antagonist. This is what Rondi repeated in his reviews, disseminating widely the "correct" exegesis of the film and adding that Rossellini was to be intended as the

initiator of a Christian filmic art, which was conceived as a modern prosecution of the ancient Greek tragedy. Rondi further repeated this on March 18, 1951, in *La Fiera letteraria*, when reviewing the picture on the occasion of its Roman opening.<sup>58</sup> He also included a detailed description of the additional shots. But his efforts were in vain, since *Stromboli* was classified “for adults without reservation” by the CCC (see Chapter 13), whose magazine *Rivista del Cinematografo* published a negative review, and was especially critical of its miraculous ending.<sup>59</sup>

As a matter of fact, *Stromboli* became a battleground for divergent opinions among Catholics. While Catholic leading figures like Morlion, Andreotti and Rondi attempted to make Rossellini the “pioneer of Catholic neorealism,” the Vatican hierarchies were not satisfied with the supplementary invocation to God. In addition to concerns about the film, Rossellini himself bore the brunt of the disagreements, as he was considered a sinner. In turn, Morlion was considered culpable for compromising his apostolate by working with a sinner, for exposing himself too much and for acting on his thoughts outside the proverbial box.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike *Stromboli*, at the 1950 Venice Festival, during the “Rossellini day,” *Francesco giullare di Dio* was included in the competition, but was unsuccessful. Although Andreotti wanted Morlion to be on the jury, as in 1948, the Vatican forbade it; and Rondi’s presence was not enough for the film to win an award.<sup>61</sup>

The film was developed in 1949 from an old project of Rossellini’s (affecting also *Stromboli*’s first draft, as we have seen), and was shot between January and June 1950 with the explicit intention of releasing it during the Holy Year.<sup>62</sup> In this picture, Morlion’s influence is less easy to detect, but his strategic role is nonetheless clear. He personally designated the Franciscan adviser Antonio Lisandrini, whose name also appeared in the credits. He maintained contact with the Vatican and with the General Master of Franciscan Order, assuring them of his oversight of the film on the strength of a specific agreement between Rossellini and Pro Deo. Morlion was designated in turn by the same General Master to visit Franciscan convents where friars were chosen to appear in the picture.<sup>63</sup> It is also possible that he thought of Ingrid Bergman to play the role of Santa Chiara (St. Clare of Assisi). On January 28, 1950, *La Settimana Incom* published an article by Ermanno Contini titled *Ingrid per devozione farà la parte di Santa Chiara* [Ingrid, for devotion, will play the role of Santa Chiara]. The news was probably unfounded: Bergman would give birth to Robertino on February 3, 1950. Nevertheless, it provoked interest from the press, and it is little wonder that it monopolized the title of Contini’s article, in which the word “devotion” applied to a shyly Protestant actress could be prompted by the Dominican. It was precisely this interest that most displeased the religious milieu, especially since Rossellini’s private life was discussed more and more in the tabloid press. The increased coverage of the progressive surfacing of his controversial behavior was coupled simultaneously with delays in finishing the picture, which in the end revealed to be different from what was expected.



Figure 7.3 and 7.4 Stills from *Francesco giullare di Dio*.

Source: Author's personal archive.

Once more, the response of critics was mostly negative. The main complaint was that Francis of Assisi had not been presented in a respectful, hagiographic manner. Significantly, the most negative reviewers were Catholic, who also criticized Rossellini's ecclesiastical advisors, and sometimes quoted Morlion's name explicitly, as well as his hasty "annexation policy."<sup>64</sup> Even Lisandrini had to intervene to defend the film against attacks focusing on what was considered a misinterpretation of Francis's holiness.<sup>65</sup>

It is no coincidence that on September 26, 1950, soon after the presentation of *Francesco giullare di Dio* at the Venice Festival, a *cine-novel* with the same title was published, which partially corrected the representation of Francis in this picture. Once again, religious consultants signed it: Morlion signed the *Presentation*; Lisandrini the *Introduction* and the *Prelude*; Father Gabriele Sinaldi—a young Dominican close to Morlion—signed the whole novelization. Transposed on the page, the episodes of Saint Francis's life regained the hagiographic quality that they had lost in Rossellini's film. Moreover, a few but focused comments brought the Holy Year's film back to the intended aim of creating a Christian neorealism starting from the plots. As Rondi wrote when reviewing the picture, this had to be seen as a step forward with regard to the outcome of *Stromboli*. There, the drama of the soul was depicted as being in conflict with the creator; here, the drama of the soul sprung from the desire to be completely given to God. Between the Venice Festival and *Francesco's* Italian release, Rondi revised part of his judgment and significantly included some criticisms. However, he did not desist from dictating the interpretive line, nor did he revise his opinion about Rossellini as the initiator of a Christian filmic art.<sup>66</sup>

A similar dynamic occurred with *Europa '51*, the third and last Rossellini film made with Morlion's collaboration. Conceived while *Francesco giullare di Dio* was being shot, this was also the third Rossellini film connected with Saint Francis. The idea came to Rossellini while in conversation with Aldo Fabrizi about what would happen if Francis were to return to earth in the modern world: he would be held as a fool.<sup>67</sup>



*Europa '51* was also the most political of the Rossellini films. At that time, the Italian director faced increasing problems: he experienced marginalization (from critics and from the Italian filmmaking system) and was confronting the difficulties of a new life and new expectations. He initially planned to make the picture in Paris and sought financing abroad during the summer of 1950.<sup>68</sup> Possibly, the failure to win at the Venice Festival did not help, and it is probable that he worked on the first treatment in Rome and Paris. The Italian draft was signed by Morlion, Tullio Pinelli, Federico Fellini and Rossellini himself.<sup>69</sup> This depicted Irène Girard, a woman of significant social standing, who becomes lost after her son's suicide attempt. She leaves her husband and begins an affair with a Communist named André. At Irène's side, André changes his understanding of Communism, and following an internal investigation he is temporarily relieved of his duties. Unable to live outside the political militancy, André leaves Irène, who is accidentally caught in a 'roundup' on her way home and finds herself assisting a dying prostitute (here named significantly Madeleine; Ines in the picture). When her husband finds her, he has her committed to an asylum for an observation period. During this time, Irène hears voices and experiences 'mystic calls,' which lead her to embrace more deeply the Christian faith. Her husband seeks a divorce, and Irène, who was declared insane but harmless, rejoins the poor in the Paris *banlieue*, and is consoled by a renewed communion with her son.

In this first treatment, although she was declared insane, Irène was not committed to the asylum indefinitely, and in the end she could freely practice Christian charity among poor people. Moreover, the plot had many positive religious characters, and the two poles oppressing Irène were, on the one hand, the "cold scientific laicism" of the bourgeois world, represented by her husband, and on the other, Communism and its gaunter solutions to human problems. On the contrary, the asylum chaplain—acting differently compared to what happens in the picture—overcomes his initial suspicions to bless Irène, declaring that there's no border between folly and holiness and by giving her the Eucharist as she leaves the asylum.

However, prospects of a French production floundered and the film was later produced in Italy. Its shooting eventually began in November 1951; meanwhile, the story changed through various rewrites, beginning with the summary of a new treatment, announced in a letter by Morlion himself who strove to overcome production problems using Andreotti's contacts.<sup>70</sup> In it, Morlion elaborates even more clearly a "central theme," according to which Irène should affirm her Christian singularity as a "scandal for the hypocrites, a folly for the pagans,"<sup>71</sup> clashing with both bourgeois indifference represented by her selfish husband (the hypocrites) and Communist aridity represented by André (the pagans). Moreover, since Irène exercises a positive influence on the "good" communist André, who is reprimanded by the party, here the story changes from André leaving her to Irène leaving him, as she is disappointed by his lack of courage in passively accepting the

steely line of materialism. Other aspects were also revised, including Irène's son's attempted suicide becoming suicide, the divorce being replaced by a legal separation and Irène's mystic experiences being assimilated to those of Joan of Arc.

Nonetheless, after production problems were resolved, new collaborators operated on the following treatment,<sup>72</sup> the narrative outline changed substantially and the story was transferred to Italy. Secondary religious characters disappeared, while new characters appeared (such as Giulietta, a poor sickly child, the young thief Irène helps to escape). The process against the Communist André was replaced by a simple rebuke, as well as by a process against Irene. For this purpose, a lawyer was introduced, and the judge and the psychiatrist were more developed. In the end, Irène rejoined her husband, interdicted but happy. Then, in the final version of the screenplay, which was submitted for censorship in January 1952 (after shooting had already begun), the "central theme" Morlion wanted went through a further drastic repositioning, and the equilibrium between characters turned into that of the final picture. In the film, Irène is judged insane by exponents of every institution, including the Church, and during the final process in which, for the first time, her reclusion is decided, the priest, too, deposes against her and condemns her as a heretic.<sup>73</sup>

After Andreotti saw *Europa '51*, he wrote a letter to Rossellini on July 14, 1952, who had asked his socio-political opinion on the picture.<sup>74</sup> In it, Andreotti raised essentially three issues. First, he questioned the lack of a distinction between Communism and Socialism.<sup>75</sup> Second, he questioned the positive actions of the Communist character, both in favor of peace and in caring for the poor, sickly child (as if only Communists cared for poor people, ignoring the Catholic tradition of charity). Third, he questioned the negative representation of the lawyer, the judge and Irène's family, as well as of the priest, unhappily juxtaposed to Irène's natural Christianity, especially in the ending, when Irène is locked up and, under her window, poor people quiver against the injustice committed, whereas her family and the priest are shown to walk away.<sup>76</sup> Then, after praising the beauty of the picture, Andreotti concluded that with suitable changes to the dialogue, it would be easy to restore the film to the intended outcome.

Andreotti's intended outcome—which was shared and pursued from the outset by Morlion—emerged even more clearly in another note handwritten by the undersecretary on July 23, after meeting with Rossellini. He duly noted that Rossellini "wanted and wants to do a picture as a Christian Democracy party man" (at least, this is what the film director must have told him).<sup>77</sup> That is, *Europa '51* had to be a political film about Christian Democracy as a central party, opposing both Communism and right-wing forces, mostly likely in view of the forthcoming 1953 parliamentary elections. This was to represent Irène in Morlion's central theme: a political theme, replacing the religious one in *Stromboli*, but still using religion for political goals.



Figure 7.5 Poster for *Europa '51*.

Source: Author's personal archive.

As far as was possible, changes were made to address this. Ahead of Venice, the dialogue in which the Communist is defined as the “dove of peace” disappeared (it survives only in English spoken versions). Moreover, other changes were made before the Italian film release.

At the Venice Festival, *Europa '51* was harshly criticized, despite winning the International Jury Prize, divided *ex aequo* between *The Quiet Man* (1952, John Ford) and *The Life of Oharu* (1952, Kenji Mizoguchi).<sup>78</sup> Critics from the left might strike hard, but so do their Catholic counterparts.

Writing in *L'Osservatore Romano*, on September 15–16, 1952, Regnoli praised Bergman's interpretation and defined *Europa '51* as the best Rossellini picture in recent years (i.e., the years during which Rossellini did not make good films), but he explicitly criticized the representation of the priest, the judge and the psychiatrist. Also, Giovanni Battista Cavallaro, writing in the *Rivista del Cinematografo*, declared himself disappointed by Rossellini, who, instead of confirming as a “pioneer [. . .] of Catholic neorealism, correcting the other one which did not seem Christian enough,”<sup>79</sup> proved to be incapable of seeing, in present society, the potential of a truly Christian solidarity.

Again, after Venice, *Europa '51* changed in compliance with Regnoli and Cavallaro's recommendations. The CCC, however, still classified it “for adults with reservation” (worse than *Stromboli*) and asked Renato Buzzonetti to explain why in an article titled *Europa '51 è un messaggio cristiano?* [Is *Europa '51* a Christian message?] in *Rivista del Cinematografo*. Buzzonetti wrote that it tried to be Christian, but it did not fully succeed because, among other reasons, it condemned the whole of present society, whose institutions appear erroneously committed to denying the Christian values.<sup>80</sup>

Yet, the Venice presentation of *Europa '51* had been preceded by an endorsement, similar to the Rome prize for *Stromboli*, newly orchestrated by Rondi. Between 1951 and 1952, Rondi himself published an essay in the collection “Quaderni della Mostra di Venezia,” which reaffirmed that Rossellini was the initiator and a profound interpreter of Christian neorealism.<sup>81</sup> And in February 1952, during the *Europa '51* shooting, Giuseppe Sala,<sup>82</sup> the newly recruited director of *Bianco e Nero*—appointed by Andreotti and immediately converted to Rossellini's cause—dedicated a special edition to him. In it, *Europa '51* was already confirmed as a model of an itinerary that was intended to be read from a religious viewpoint. Sala himself introduced the special edition of *Bianco e Nero* with an essay that revisited Rossellini's work from *Roma città aperta* to *La macchina ammazzacattivi* and *Europa '51* (both still unreleased), including *Paisà*, *Germania anno zero* and *Stromboli* (but significantly omitting *L'amore*), and defined Rossellini as the definitive exponent of a religious neorealism.<sup>83</sup> Other writings attributed to this reading go back to *La nave bianca* (1941).<sup>84</sup> This critical approach was pursued also after *Europa '51*'s Venice presentation and its Italian release, despite its evident problematic aspects,

which were sometimes recognized, but were nonetheless incorporated into a Christian reading.

Despite this considerable endorsement, not even *Europa '51* succeeded in making his director the pioneer of Catholic neorealism. On the contrary, it further sharpened opposition between ecclesiastical hierarchies and the “triple alliance” of Morlion, Andreotti and Rondi,<sup>85</sup> who had invested in such a controversial figure. According to the Vatican, Rossellini remained a sinner, who in addition made films that deviated substantially from Morlion’s writings, Rondi’s reviews and Andreotti’s expectations.

Although he sought Catholic support, Rossellini always made his personal viewpoint prevail. This was true in *Stromboli*, *Francesco* and *Europa '51*, which were deeply autobiographical and sprung from Rossellini’s own sense of exclusion and difference. He did this even in *Europa '51*, which Morlion was involved in from the very beginning, influencing the plot as emotional propaganda and affecting the protagonist by opposite extremes. However, Rossellini overturned this and projected himself onto that character, who was charged with anti-conformism and held as a fool by refusing to take sides during a Cold War political (and cultural) tangle.

*Europa '51* was the last Rossellini film to star Ingrid Bergman, which was shown in Venice (where the actress never won an award). *Viaggio in Italia* (1954) was not even shown out of competition and was released almost one year and a half after it was made. During this long wait, Sala’s *Bianco e Nero* operated a covert promotion by publishing some dialogue and commenting on the underlying spiritual aspects of its plot.<sup>86</sup> After the film was released, a rare positive review by Rondi appeared in the *Rivista del Cinematografo*, while he had previously written a less favorable review for the picture in *La Fiera Letteraria*.<sup>87</sup> In doing so, he once again focused on the underlying spiritual orientation of Rossellini films from a Christian viewpoint, repeatedly reiterating the critical line about neorealism and its initiator.

Meanwhile, in 1954, Andreotti relinquished his mandate, and Morlion took his originality and his exuberance elsewhere. The climate of fear and urgency that characterized the immediate post-war years was over, and in 1950s Italy, both Morlion’s behavior and his innovative methodology were increasingly problematic. Not only were his means of forging relationships with “others” problematic, but his positive ideas about the power of communication, visibility and the power of images differed from the Vatican’s policy at that time as well.

On the larger stage, the Vatican’s attitude towards communication, visibility and the power of images changed, and Morlion, who like Rossellini was a sort of outsider in the Italian context of the time, would now probably be regarded as a pioneer. Likewise, critical perception and cinematic sensitivity also changed, and the Rossellini films that were so troublesome when first released are now read in a positive manner.

When it came to creating a Catholic neorealism, the project failed to make good political capital of Rossellini’s production. It succeeded, however, in

enabling a religious reading of Rossellini by focusing on the presence of an authentic spiritual sensitivity. And, of course, such a reading is ultimately open to a Christian interpretation.

## NOTES

1. Morlion, Félix A. 1944. *The Apostolate of Public Opinion*. Montreal: Fides, 115.
2. Andreotti, Giulio. 1988. *L'URSS vista da vicino*. Milan: Rizzoli, 307. My translation.
3. The Fondo Luigi Sturzo (in Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Rome—ASILS from now on) preserves the epistolar exchange between Sturzo and Morlion, proving Morlion's difficulties in going to Italy before summer 1944.
4. This letter, translated in Italian, is reproduced in Tranfaglia, Nicola. 2004. *Come nasce la Repubblica. La mafia, il Vaticano e il neofascismo nei documenti americani e italiani 1943–1947*. Milan: Bompiani (the original in English is conserved at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland). The Fondo Luigi Sturzo (in ASILS) also includes part of the original correspondence between Sturzo and Brennan, who on May 6, 1944, writes: "Concerning Father Morlion's exit permit, I gathered from his conversation that he understood the proper procedure, and that he was going to go ahead with the necessary steps, in which he expected to have help from his embassy here." Sturzo answers Brennan on May 9 sending "a memorandum on the reasons for his [Morlion's] trip to Italy [. . .] a sheet on Pro Deo Movement [. . .] a letter for His Exc. Rodino" and concludes: "I know personally Father Morlion; he is hundred per cent pro Allies and pro democracy. His work in the catholic milieu in many countries is very good."
5. Morlion's originality consisted not only in using young teachers, possibly layman teachers (including Andreotti and Gian Luigi Rondi, as well as Roberto Rossellini, Federico Fellini or Communists like Cesare Zavattini and Sergio Amidei). It also consisted in the conviction that Communists were not all the same and that "good" Communists could be seduced and persuaded to cease to be Communist. As we shall see, this conviction can also be found in his contribution to the *Europa '51* treatment. Among others, see Morlion, *The Apostolate of Public Opinion*.
6. See Brady, Anna M. 1944. "Introduction" to Morlion, *The Apostolate of Public Opinion*, dating "The Feast of Assumption, New York, 1944" when Morlion "is on his way back to Europe to reconstitute the Pro Deo work there" (p. 32). See also the "Presentazione del movimento 'Pro Deo' ai cattolici militanti italiani," i.e., the presentation to the Italian edition of Morlion's book, translated as *L'Apostolato dell'opinione pubblica* (Rome: Sudium, 1947) by Vittorino Veronese who writes that Morlion arrives in Rome in September 1944.
7. Lippmann, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co.
8. According to the colophon of the Italian edition, the book was first written in English and also published in French (in Montreal by Fides), Spanish (in Buenos Aires) and English by CIP in New York. However, the English edition I consulted was published in Montreal by Fides.
9. See Treveri Gennari, Daniela. 2009. *Post-War Italian Cinema. American Intervention, Vatican Interests*. New York: Routledge.
10. See Andreotti, Giulio. 2006. *De Gasperi*. Palermo: Sellerio. See also a Earl Brennan letter to Vincent J. Scanporino (OSS, Algeri) dated November 15, 1943, conserved at the National Archives and Records Administration,

College Park, Maryland, and translated in Italian in Tranfaglia, Nicola. 2011. *La santissima trinità. Mafia, Vaticano e servizi segreti all'assalto dell'Italia 1943–1947*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

11. The institute was founded to work as a connection for the cooperation between Vatican and American secret services against the advent of Communism in Italy (see in the Fondo Luigi Sturzo, in ASILS, the epistolar exchange between Sturzo, Anna Mary Brady and Morlion, notably a letter by Morlion to Sturzo dated January 27, 1944, in which the Dominican proposes to the Italian politician to use propaganda services from Pro Deo in the imminent post-war Italy). Morlion becomes its president on March 14, 1946, by appointment of Martin Gillet, General Master of Dominicans, who signs a letter published in the Italian edition of *The Apostolate of Public Opinion*. *Nihil obstat* came from Giovanni Battista Montini, future Pope Paolo VI, at that time substitute of the Vatican State Secretary [Segreteria di Stato Vaticana]; Andreotti (*L'URSS vista da vicino*) recalls that Morlion had been recommended to Montini by the well-known publisher Henry Luce.
12. Until the 1948 elections, *L'ora dell'azione* dealt only with political issues. After the Christian Democracy's victory, it started a film review column in cooperation with the cinematographic department of the *Università Internazionale Pro Deo* in Rome, the DOCIP (*Documentation Cinématographique de la Presse*) in Brussels and the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico* (CCC) in Rome. See "Per la fase costruttiva dell'apostolato del cinema," *L'ora dell'azione*, no. 42, 18 novembre 1948. The magazine ceased to be published in November 1952.
13. See Morlion, Félix. 1948. "Cos'è l'Unione Internazionale 'Pro Deo'?" *L'ora dell'azione*, June 27.
14. See Morlion in Brady, Anna Mary, "Come si sgonfia una grossa montatura giornalistica," *L'ora dell'azione*, February 25, 1950.
15. See *Fundamentals on Italy*, CIP, vol. 1, no. 3, June 1943.
16. In addition to *Roma città aperta* and *Paisà*, a similar role has been played by *Il sole sorge ancora* (Aldo Vergano, 1946) and *Vivere in pace* (Luigi Zampa, 1946). Let's notice that this cannot be said about neorealistic films by Vittorio De Sica as *Sciuscià* (1946), *Ladri di biciclette* (1948) and *Umberto D* (1952), lacking an addition of positive priests.
17. See, among others, Bernadrini, Aldo. 1981. "Cattolici e cinema italiano," in Gianfranco Gori and Stefano Pivano, eds. *Bianco e Nero. Gli anni del cinema in parrocchia*. Rimini: Maggioli.
18. Morlion is there to promote a film destined for oratory movie theaters—*O.K. John!* (Ugo Fasano and Giovanni D'Eramo, 1946)—about a young priest helping ragamuffins; see "Okey John! a Bruxelles," *Rivista del Cinematografo*, XX, nos. 7–8, July/August 1947.
19. See Morlion in Brady, "Come si sgonfia una grossa montatura giornalistica."
20. In a filmed interview by Tatti Sanguineti, entitled *Giulio Andreotti. Il cinema visto da vicino* (its first part was presented at the 2014 Venice Festival), Andreotti states that his designation was suggested to De Gasperi by Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini, future Pope Paolo VI. See "Il giovane Divo e il cinema," *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, May 18, 1913.
21. See Andreotti, Giulio. 1947. *Per la libertà di stampa*, speech pronounced at the constituent assembly on April 14, 1947. The speech can be accessed at <http://www.sturzo.it/archivio-andreotti/scritti-discorsi/banca-dati>.
22. See, among others, Quaglietti, Lorenzo. 1980. *Storia economico-politica del cinema italiano 1945–1980*. Rome: Editori Riuniti.
23. Morlion, Félix A. 1948. "Le basi filosofiche del neorealismo cinematografico italiano," *Bianco e Nero*, IX, no. 4, June.

24. Surely Morlion thinks of André Bazin ("Le réalisme cinématographique et l'école italienne de la libération," *Esprit*, XVI, no. 1, January 1948). See also Vasile, Turi. 1947. "Festival," *Rivista del Cinematografo*, XX, nos. 7–8, July/August 1947.
25. See Giulio Andreotti, letter to Giovanni Battista Montini, November 9, 1948, conserved in the Archivio Giulio Andreotti (AGA from now on), in ASILS, in which Andreotti literally negotiates the possibility to adopt, among others, a positive attitude towards neorealism. See also Andreotti, *L'URSS vista da vicino*.
26. Andreotti, Giulio. 1948. "I film italiani nella polemica parlamentare," *Bianco e Nero*, IX, no. 10, December.
27. Cavallaro, Giovanni Battista. 1952. "Bilancio di un Festival," *Rivista del Cinematografo*, XXV, nos. 9–10, September/October: 6.
28. Unlike Aldo Vergano, who was a notorious Communist, even if his *Il sole sorge ancora* (1946) includes a positive priest. See Marcello Vazio, "Una cisazione seccante ma necessaria," *Rivista del Cinematografo*, XXI, nos. 5–6, May/June 1948.
29. Luigi Chiarini affirms it openly in "Avviso," *Bianco e Nero*, IX, no. 1, January 1948.
30. See Serri, Mirella, 2005, *I redenti. Gli intellettuali che vissero due volte 1938–1948*, Milano: Corbaccio; and Siniscalchi, Claudio, "Il cinema e la politica nell'Italia del dopoguerra," in Preziosi, Ernesto, ed. 2014. *Luigi Gedda nella storia della Chiesa e del Paese*. Rome: AVE.
31. Giorgio Amendola had been a Rossellini schoolmate, who subsequently signed the *Roma città aperta* visa. See, among others, Roncoroni, Stefano. 2006. *La storia di Roma città aperta*. Bologna/Recco: Cineteca di Bologna/Le mani.
32. Andreotti states it in an interview in Farassino, Alberto, ed. 1989. *Neorealismo. Cinema italiano 1945–1949*. Turin: EDT.
33. To Morlion, an exemplum of efficacy were Frank Capra's pictures; see Morlion, *The Apostolate of Public Opinion*. See also Forni, Gino. 1949. "Padre Morlion ammira Ingrid Bergman e Spencer Tracy," *Il Mattino*, February 11, 1949.
34. See Andreotti's interventions to help the picture obtain a visa in documents conserved at the Direzione Generale per il Cinema (MIBACT).
35. See Johnson, William Bruce. 2008. *Miracles & Sacrilege. Roberto Rossellini, the Church, and the Film Censorship in Hollywood*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. See also Wittern-Keller, Laura and Haberski, Raymond. 2008. *The Miracle Case. Film Censorship and the Supreme Court*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press.
36. Andreotti himself writes it in his November 9, 1948, letter to Montini (in AGA, ASILS).
37. Morlion in Brady, "Come si sgonfia una grossa montatura giornalistica."
38. See Martini, Andrea, ed. 2010. *L'antirossellinismo*. Turin: Kaplan.
39. See Morlion in Brady, "Come si sgonfia una grossa montatura giornalistica."
40. On *Stromboli's* versions and variants, see Dagrada, Elena. 2005 [2008 2nd enlarged edition]. *Le varianti trasparenti. I film con Ingrid Bergman di Roberto Rossellini*. Milan: LED.
41. Bergman, Ingrid and Burges, Alan. 1980. *Ingrid Bergman. My Story*. New York: Delacorte Press, 192. See also Vigorelli, Giancarlo. 1949. *L'avventura italiana di Ingrid Bergman*, "bellezza d'Italia," III, no. 4, who relates discussions among Morlion and Sergio Amidei about the film title.
42. In all versions of *Stromboli*, the story was signed by Sergio Amidei, G.P. Gallegari, Art Cohn and Renzo Cesana. Morlion's name appears in the credits of the international distributed version this way: "Religious theme inspired by FATHER FELIX MORLION O.P."



43. See a testimony of this optimistic forecast in Bergman-Burges, *Ingrid Bergman. My Story*, 259–260: “On December 14, 1949, a letter from the Belgian RKO representative in Brussels reached Roberto and Ingrid. The night before, he had had the privilege of screening the first print of *Stromboli*. He was ecstatic: *Stromboli* is overwhelming. Here is a picture which will satisfy the taste of the most discriminating movie-goers (including the most refined film critics) and which will have at the same time irresistible appeal to the general public. *Stromboli* is the best Rossellini picture. *Stromboli* is the best Bergman picture. *Stromboli* is the picture of 1950. Ingrid Bergman’s performance in *Stromboli* is without question and by far the best of her brilliant career [. . .] In short *Stromboli*, the first of our all European releases for the 1950–1951 season, will be the sensation of Europe, and I want you to start talking to exhibitors right now.”
44. See Rondi, Gian Luigi. 1998. *Un lungo viaggio. Cinquant’anni di cinema italiano raccontato da un testimone*. Florence: Le Monnier.
45. See Morlion in Brady, “Come si sgonfia una grossa montatura giornalistica.”
46. At that time, Consiglio was a member of Italian parliament, but he was also Rossellini’s friend and former collaborator for *Roma città aperta* and *L’uomo dalla croce*. Andreotti’s speech can be found at <http://www.camera.it/>.
47. Actually, Senator Johnson pronounced his speech on March 14, 1950. Andreotti’s documentation on this event is conserved in AGA, ASILS.
48. See Rondi, *Un lungo viaggio*; and Rondi in Casavecchia, Simone. 2008. *Rondi visto da vicino*. Cantalupo in Sabina: Sabinae.
49. Other members were Antonio Baldini, Emilio Cecchi, Piero Gadda Conti, Mario Gromo, Filippo Sacchi and Gino Visentini.
50. About Rondi teaching at Pro Deo from 1948 and 1949 to 1953, as well as about his presence on *Stromboli*’s set, see especially Casavecchia, *Rondi visto da vicino*. See also a recent interview by Antonio Gnoli in *la Repubblica*, July 21, 1913, where Rondi talks about his ties with Andreotti and claims his support to Rossellini. It is important to underline that when Ingrid Bergman arrived in Italy, she could not speak Italian; with Rondi, she could speak French and, above all, with Morlion she could speak English.
51. See Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*, and Dagrada, Elena. 2010. “Quanto la critica si divide. A proposito degli ‘anni Bergman,’” in Martini, ed. *L’antirossellinismo*.
52. It had also been seen by many priests and bishops, as is testified in Bergman-Burges, *Ingrid Bergman. My Story*, 269: “[In February 1950], the first version of *Stromboli* was being shown to a selected audience of several hundred priests and a sprinkling of bishops to illustrate that its ending was inspired and uplifting and had little in common with the hurriedly edited version slapped together by RKO and released across the United States.”
53. The document is reproduced in Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*.
54. See Dagrada, “Quanto la critica si divide.” Because of all these problems, the film likely could not be released during the Holy Year.
55. See Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*.
56. It also contained the cutting of a scene in which Karin stares at length at the fish just caught by her husband, then goes to bed and lies there pensively for a while. The next morning, she starts decorating her home, following the advice the parish priest gave her in the previous sequence. Likely, this cut was aimed to avoid detracting from the influence of God’s minister on Karin’s decision. It is probably Morlion’s voice pronouncing the advice: “If you do this, merciful God will help you,” addressed to Karin at the end of their conversation on the cliff. In fact, it differs from the actor’s voice interpreting the priest; see Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*.

57. See Morlion in Arosio, Mario. 1977. "Il figliol prodigo," *Rivista del Cinematografo*, LL, nos. 7–8, July/August. See also Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*.
58. Its title is significant: *In Stromboli una donna chiama Dio in soccorso contro se stessa* [In *Stromboli* a woman calls God against herself]. On the one hand, it echoes the biblical quotation of San Paolo, positioned at the beginning of the picture (missing only in the RKO version), which in the international version becomes the Isaiah verse ("I was found of them that sought me not: I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me."). That is, it echoes the synthesis of Morlion's religious theme. On the other hand, it mediates Morlion's changes, guided by Regnoli.
59. See Santarelli, Giorgio. 1951. "Stromboli," *Rivista del Cinematografo*, XXIV, no. 5.
60. See at least Andreotti (1988) on a polemics about a picture showing Morlion and Anna Magnani at the Venice Festival.
61. See Subini, Tomaso. 2011 [2013 2nd enlarged edition]. *La doppia vita di "Francesco giullare di Dio."* Giulio Andreotti, Félix Morlion e Roberto Rossellini. Milano: Libraccio. The mistake, of course, had been not to present *Stromboli* in competition: Bergman played with her own voice and would surely win a prize.
62. Former Rossellini collaborators were Diego Fabbri and Federico Fellini. Subsequently, a main collaborator was Brunello Rondi (Gian Luigi's brother).
63. See Subini, *La doppia vita di "Francesco giullare di Dio."*
64. See Pitta, Antonio and Capriolo, Ettore, eds. 1952 "Sacerdoti: Dio ha bisogno degli uomini," *Cinema*, no. 89, June 30, 1952.
65. See "Ita. Rassegna di informazioni," XVIII, no. 4, April/May 1951 (column: *Il cinema italiano all'estero*).
66. See Gian Luigi Rondi, "'Stromboli' e 'Francesco' due film di Roberto Rossellini," *Il Tempo*, August 27, 1950; "Panorama dal festival di Venezia," *La Fiera Letteraria*, V, nos 35–36, September 10, 1950; and "Francesco giullare di Dio. Cinema di "verità interiori," *La Fiera Letteraria*, V, no. 51, December 24, 1950.
67. See Schérer, Maurice, Rohmer, Eric and Truffaut, François. 1954. "Entretien avec Roberto Rossellini," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 37, July.
68. See Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*.
69. An identical unsigned French version also exists. It is part of the Fond Le Chanois and is conserved in Paris at the BiFi (Bibliothèque du Film et de l'Image). Other Rossellini collaborators were at least Jean-Paul Le Chanois, Charles Spaak and Enrico Fulchignoni.
70. See Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*.
71. Quoting Saint Paul (1 Cor 1:23). Summary is reproduced in Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*.
72. This treatment is conserved in the Archivio Antonio Pietrangeli (Centro Cinema—Città di Cesena), and in Rome at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS). In time, other Rossellini collaborators were Sandro De Feo, Ivo Perilli, Brunello Rondi and Diego Fabbri, and subsequently Mario Pannunzio and Antonio Pietrangeli. Also, Massimo Mida, Ennio De Concini and Antonello Trombadori were consulted. Rossellini used to abound in collaborators in order to feel more free to act his own way.
73. On *Europa '51* versions and variants, see Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*.
74. The letter is preserved in AGA (ASILS) and is reproduced in Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*.
75. This distinction was important not only in itself, but also because in those years Christian Democracy was actually adopting social politics inspired by

Christian values, while Communism was identified with Soviet bloc activity during the Cold War, and Italian Communist party was tied to the USSR.

76. On this point, see Dagrada, *Le varianti trasparenti*.
77. The handwritten note is preserved in AGA (ASILS). During the 1953 electoral campaign, right-wing members were particularly present (and obtained good results at the elections). *Europa '51* was released in December 1952 and reached main Italian cities in 1953.
78. Ingrid Bergman could not be awarded because *Europa '51*'s Italian version was dubbed.
79. Cavallaro, *Bilancio di un Festival*, 6.
80. Buzzonetti, Renato. 1953. "Europa '51 è un messaggio cristiano?" *Rivista del Cinematografo*, XXVI, no. 1, January 1953.
81. See Rondi, Gian Luigi. 1951. *Cinema italiano 1945–1951. Il dopoguerra, in Il neorealismo italiano. Documentazioni*. Rome: Quaderni della Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica di Venezia.
82. On Giuseppe Sala, see Brunetta, Gian Piero. 1982 [1993 2nd revised edition]. *Storia del cinema italiano*, vol. III, *Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico. 1945–1959*, Roma: Editori Riuniti. See also Verdone, Mario. 1990. "Il ruolo di 'Bianco e Nero' negli anni Cinquanta," *La scena e lo schermo*, nos. 3–4.
83. See Sala, Giuseppe. 1952. "Significato di Rossellini," *Bianco e Nero*, XIII, no. 2, February. It's worth noting that other Rossellini films in that period were Catholic productions.
84. Rossellini, Roberto and Verdone, Mario. 1952. "Colloquio sul neorealismo," *Bianco e Nero*, XIII, no. 2, February.
85. As we have seen, the tasks in this alliance were quite definite: Morlion would write (he kept for himself the role of "religious councilor" and ghost screenwriter); Andreotti would "produce" (i.e., he would facilitate production contacts and financings, also through film awards and the like) and Rondi would review (through a widespread presence as a film critic in many film journals and newspapers, and other official contexts, also involving other signatures). However, on the one hand, Morlion and Andreotti were active in promoting a cultural policy aimed at the making of Catholic neorealist films (not only by Rossellini) and of Catholic films in general. On the other hand, Morlion was really convinced that screenwriters were more important than film directors. In a way, he was against the "politique des auteurs" just before it existed, and he really thought he could write stories to which film directors would only "add shots." See Morlion, Félix A. 1949. "Débat Réalisateur-Scénariste. L'expérience italienne dans la crise mondiale du scénario," *Revue internationale du cinéma*, I., no. 4; and Agel, Henri. 1952. *Le cinéma a-t-il une âme?* Paris: Cerf. See also François Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 31, 1954.
86. See "Viaggio in Italia di Roberto Rossellini (Frammenti di dialogo)," *Bianco e Nero*, XIV, no. 11, November 1953.
87. See *Rivista del Cinematografo*, XXVII, no. 11, 1954; and *La Fiera Letteraria*, October 24, 1954.

## **Part III**

# **Technology and Production**

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## 8 A Catholic Voice in Talking Pictures

### The International Eidophon Company (1930–1934)

*Karel Dibbets*

In 1932, Pope Pius XI gave his blessing to a company that was expected to increase the Catholic Church's influence in the international film industry. This company, founded in Amsterdam and called International Eidophon NV, would apply itself to the production of Catholic talking pictures. Previously, the Catholic Church had only been involved in the distribution and screening of films. Eidophon, however, promised to be the most ambitious attempt to date at launching the production of Catholic films for the international market. The initiative was proposed by a number of Dutch Catholics, who believed the new 'talkies' to be a "golden opportunity for a Catholic film cartel."<sup>1</sup> The aspirant Catholic producers developed and presented an audacious plan and began their search for financing. They approached the Dutch bishops, who in turn involved the Vatican. Eventually, the entire Catholic hierarchy would be engaged in financing the ambitious project. Success, however, eluded them, and the entire initiative ended in a fiasco.

After Eidophon folded, the matter was not mentioned anymore; it seemed that people preferred to forget all about it. However, some evidence confirming a fervent enthusiasm to use new technology for making sound films has been preserved in the archives of dioceses, Catholic organizations and private individuals in the Netherlands. Some Catholics even allowed themselves to become carried away by overhyped expectations and incorrect assessments. For others, belief in the new technology tended towards the chiliastic. They became convinced that sound film would advance the salvation of the world. Believers were eventually brought back down to earth, however, and the Catholic Church lost another dream. The subject of large-scale Catholic film production never came up again.

The history of Eidophon is the history of an *idée fixe*, and any study dealing with the reception of innovations should pay close attention to this episode. It is a clear and extreme example of a failed attempt to gain control over a new technology. This chapter will show how this *idée fixe* originated and what its consequences were.<sup>2</sup>

## A GIFT FROM GOD

The events leading up to the creation of Eidophon started in 1926. At that time, various German engineers were simultaneously experimenting with technology for sound film in a number of different locations. The most prominent group of inventors, TriErgon, had already laid the foundation for a system that enabled the recording and reproduction of sound by optical means. One of the many who followed in TriErgon's footsteps in an attempt to develop further the technology was a German priest and physicist, Dr. Heinrich Könemann (1883–1966) from Westphalia. Könemann was supported financially by Dutch multimillionaire Bernard Joseph Brenninkmeyer (1871–1945), who was also born in Westphalia, and who co-owned the well-known Dutch clothing company C&A. The Brenninkmeyer family often sponsored Catholic projects in the Netherlands, having a keen interest in Catholic media; for instance, they facilitated the founding of the Dutch Catholic public broadcasting organization KRO by means of a generous donation.<sup>3</sup> Starting 1926, Brenninkmeyer ensured that Könemann could concentrate exclusively on his experiments, and began investing an annual sum of 50,000 guilders in his laboratory.<sup>4</sup>

Könemann did not disappoint Brenninkmeyer. He succeeded in developing and patenting his own system for recording and projecting films with optical sound. The importance of his invention was mostly that his new method of sound amplification did not require a high voltage. A disadvantage, however, was that it only worked in combination with other patents.<sup>5</sup>

What plans did Brenninkmeyer have for Könemann's invention? In 1928, when the owners of the most important sound film patents in Europe were planning to work together in a German joint-stock company, Tobis AG, Brenninkmeyer wanted to be involved. He offered Könemann's patents in exchange for a package of shares in Tobis, with a nominal value of 800,000 German marks.<sup>6</sup> In addition, he requested a seat on the board of directors. The transaction did not go through, however, and Brenninkmeyer did not join Tobis.<sup>7</sup> He subsequently failed to participate in the European-American patent meetings that concluded with the notorious cartel agreement in Paris, in July 1930, and as a result remained excluded from this international sound film cartel.<sup>8</sup> However, if anyone thought that Brenninkmeyer and Könemann were permanently out of the game, they would have been sorely mistaken.

Under the heading "Now or never—a golden opportunity for a Catholic film cartel," the Dutch Dominican priest Hyacinth Hermans wrote an alarming article in the Catholic newspaper *De Maasbode* in February 1931.<sup>9</sup> In it, he noted that the film medium was expanding enormously and was "outgrowing the press and radio in significance." He expressed regret that the Catholics had been indifferent to the new medium for too long: "Just look at Russia!" There, the best resources were dedicated to film, "which, apparently peacefully and without the clamour of war, is transcending the boundaries of countries and nations in order to win over the whole of a

new humanity to her ideas, thereby winning their allegiance. [. . .] And this begs the question: can we catch up? Can we as Catholics, and as a world power, still make ourselves heard in the area of cinematography?" Now that this danger had become so great, wrote Father Hermans, it was lucky that help was at hand. A priest, Dr. Könemann, had developed a new technology for sound on film. Thanks to this invention, this "Godsend," the Catholic Church would have a last chance to stake a place in the international film industry. It was now or never. "Must and should we give the cinematography of the future carte blanche to allow itself to be formed into a weapon against the church, the faith and the good morals of our Christian people, or should we now, at this weighty and crucial hour, be found lacking in the use of this Godsend to the salvation of humanity and Christendom?" the priest mused.

Hermans's call to fellow Catholics would be repeated many times in 1931, and he kept emphasizing the same message: work on a Catholic film industry needed to begin straight away, and Könemann's invention would provide the material basis for it. Hermans held considerable authority—he represented the Catholic community on the Dutch National Board of Film Censors—and he did not fail to exercise his influence on the bishops (see also Chapter 14). Moreover, he sought an international audience for his message. He found it in Zurich, where the international committee for Catholic cinematography (the OCIC, or *Office Catholique International du Cinématographie*, see Chapter 1) held a conference in the summer of 1931, at which the options for the Roman Catholic Church having its own film industry were discussed at length.<sup>10</sup>

How was Hermans's campaign received in the Netherlands? His plea caused quite a stir in Catholic circles. Besides agreement, criticism was also expressed. There were some serious doubts about Könemann's patent claims, which some felt were not at all important to the founding of a Catholic film industry. It was not the patents, but the financing that became the greatest bone of contention. "You will never be able to do it like that!" P.J.G. Stuiver wrote to Hermans.<sup>11</sup> After all, the Roman Catholic press and radio stations did not need any patents for their rotary presses and radio transmitters, did they? Besides, the whole Roman Catholic industry would collapse when these patents expired a few years later.

The divergence of opinions also existed in matters other than the patents. It seemed possible to dismiss Könemann's invention and still be a strong supporter of the notion of a Catholic film industry. Opinions were particularly strongly divided on the matter of how to bring about a Catholic production. Stuiver (quoted earlier) had a pronounced preference for a market-driven approach. A Catholic film industry on an international scale was still subject to the requirements of a capitalist production process and would have to turn a profit in order to continue to exist. The comparison with Russia was not appropriate, in Stuiver's opinion, because the Soviet economic system allowed the artist to work without too much concern for expense as long as the film could be used as propaganda.



Hermans had an affinity with the commercial approach. He would have liked to have seen the Church and capitalism working together in a joint venture for economic and moral profitability, but he encountered a new generation of young Catholics who did not support the idea of Church-run companies, who in fact wanted film to be free as an art form. Janus van Domburg, who wrote for several Roman Catholic publications about film, and who expressed an unshakeable support for the younger generation of Catholic filmmakers, strongly rejected Hermans's proposals. Of course he wanted Catholic filmmakers to get assignments, but he was highly suspicious of the idea of linking the Church and capitalism:

Until now, which Catholic institution has given film makers with any talent a fair chance? [. . .] Will this invention bring about any change in the situation? Will this lead to better films? Will we see the invention fall into the hands of those who demand that, besides being Catholic, a Catholic film should also be a film?

Van Domburg was just as good at posing rhetorical questions as Hermans. "International capital will pay little heed to the Netherlands," he argued. "Look at the Küchenmeister enterprise," he continued, referring to the company that controlled the European sound film industry and in which Dutch banks had a controlling interest. "Where is the Dutch sound film of this company?"<sup>12</sup>

While this discussion played out in public, the supporters of the plan went to work behind the scenes with great determination. Although they could count on their spiritual leaders' moral support, they now also needed to get financial support, and they lobbied heavily among well-to-do Catholics.<sup>13</sup> The lobbyists encountered a great deal of skepticism, but they continued working quietly on the legal framework for a large international company that would produce Catholic films, supported by prominent Catholics with expertise and contacts. By the end of 1931, the work had been completed, and Hermans could announce the name of the new company: International Eidophon.<sup>14</sup>

### ***PERICULUM IN MORA***

In December 1931, Brenninkmeyer and Könemann sent their foundation plan for International Eidophon NV to potential financiers. The plan was supposed to convince wealthy Catholics that financial participation in the project did not involve any excessive risk and that its idealistic objectives alone made it worthwhile. The plan contained a detailed description of the legal, economic and organizational aspects of the new company. In the introduction, Brenninkmeyer once again pulled out all the ideological stops. In fact, he repeated—sometimes verbatim—what Hermans had already

written: that the Catholic Church had been left behind with regard to film and needed to take action, just as it had with the press and radio, in order to acquire influence in the film industry. "Against this deluge of brash materialism that is inundating the world through the cinemas," he argued, "we want to allow a strong stream of good morals, a healthy worldview, and of higher idealism to flow in against it."<sup>15</sup> It was therefore of vital importance that Catholics obtain their own means of production. Könemann's patents would be very useful in this regard.

In order to achieve this lofty goal, the project's initiators wanted to follow the commercial route. Their plan made provision for the founding of a public limited company, with an authorized capital of 3 million guilders, about 30 million US dollars in 2014 (this amount was later reduced to 1.7 million guilders). The new company would produce and distribute Catholic films in an international context and, at a later stage, also run cinemas. The parent company would be based in the Netherlands, while subsidiaries would be founded in other countries, starting with Germany. With regard to the patents, the plan only mentioned them as a way to save costs, allowing Eidophon to produce films at a lower cost than other companies. The initial development costs, budgeted at 400,000 guilders and advanced by the founders over the previous six years, did not need to be repaid, either in the form of cash or in shares. Könemann's patents were transferred to Eidophon for a sum of 1000 guilders. This seems like a generous gesture from Breninkmeyer, but he was probably doing so as a concession in response to earlier objections about the use of his invention.

How did they think that Eidophon could function in practice? Well, a start-up capital of 850,000 guilders was all that was needed.<sup>16</sup> With this amount, the parent company could be set up and run for a year. The initial costs for the operating company were also covered by it, including the purchase of a studio, the hiring of equipment and the production of its first films. Eidophon hired the sound equipment from Klangfilm, which included the staff to operate it (Könemann's invention played no role in this whatsoever). A fully equipped film studio in Berlin could be bought from Terra Film. The intention was to make five films in the first six months, of which two would be fully financed by Eidophon, and three in co-production.

The founders were particularly upbeat about the potential profitability of Eidophon. They calculated that film rental could make an annual profit of 420,000 guilders for the operating company. After costs, this would leave a profit of 240,000 guilders for the parent company. "For an investment of 850,000, this means a return of more than 28 percent," the founders solemnly claimed in the plan, in which case, a dividend of 8 percent could be paid out to shareholders. There was good reason, therefore, for dedicating three pages of the plan to how profits would be distributed.

With regard to the production of Dutch films, the founders were in no doubt: this kind of "experiment" was still far too risky, "in as much as the production and rental of talking films in the Dutch language formed an

important consideration during the preparatory work.”<sup>17</sup> And yet, although the first Eidophon films would be made in Germany and in German, the “ideological and financial leadership” would remain in the hands of the Dutch parent company.

On June 11, 1932, the official founding of International Eidophon NV took place in Amsterdam. Brenninkmeyer was to act as chairman of the supervisory board. He had assembled a choice selection of prominent Catholics around him as fellow members of the board: the politician J.B. Bomans from Heemstede, the nation’s grocer, Dr. G.J.M. de Gruyter from Den Bosch, the industrialists B.A.H. Deiters and J.H.J. de Jong, the Amsterdam-based lawyer G.A.J.M. Mutsaerts and the publisher H.M.G.M. Nelissen. He appointed Dr. H. Könemann as managing director, who would, however, soon be replaced by F.A.M. Smithuysen. The company’s authorized share capital totaled 1.7 million guilders, of which 357,500 guilders had been placed and paid.<sup>18</sup>

In the months prior to the launching of the foundation plan, at the end of 1931, a more intensive campaign had been run in order to raise the necessary capital, not only by Brenninkmeyer himself, but also by George Mutsaerts, for whom the cause was very dear.<sup>19</sup> They received pledges of considerable amounts from a number of Catholics, but this was still nowhere near enough. To their disappointment, they had to note that the clergy did not cooperate enough in the fundraising campaign. There was still no official approval from Rome, and as long as that permission had not been granted, the Dutch spiritual leaders did not dare praise the plan in public.

In May 1932, when they did not even have half the start-up capital, they complained about this in a conversation with Monsignor Diepen, the Bishop of Den Bosch.<sup>20</sup> If Brenninkmeyer were to sell Könemann’s patents, they argued, this would not be in the interests of Catholics. Now that he was not going to be selling them, it was reasonable that the church offer moral support in raising capital for Eidophon in return for his offer. “They still hope therefore—and there is such a thing as *periculum in mora*—that they will receive more support from the clergy to obtain more fruits for their labour from the laypeople.” To which the bishop gave them permission on behalf of the Dutch dioceses to “seek high-standing priests who will, as a result, declare themselves willing to provide information exclusively about the *cultural value* of this company, but that for the rest the authority of the Dutch bishops should be left out of it.”

Fortunately, the long-awaited letter from Rome also arrived in June 1932. The document was written in Latin, the official language of the Roman Catholic Church. In his letter to Monsignor Jansen, the Archbishop of Utrecht, Cardinal Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII, informed the archbishop that Pope Pius XI gave Eidophon his blessing:

His Holiness the Pope grants his permission and already wishes such an initiative much success. It is certainly worthy of praise that the wonderful inventions of human civilization are used in such a way that they will serve to the glorification of God, as well as to the strengthening

and propagation of the Christian faith. [ . . . ] The Holy Father therefore wishes the plan success and imparts his Apostolic blessing for the obtaining of God's help to all those who, in obedience to the precepts and admonitions of the Church, are offering their strength to the creation and realization of this project.<sup>21</sup>



DAL VATICANO, die 17 Junii 1932

N° 112159  
DA CITARSI NELLA RISPOSTA

Exc.mo ac Rev.mo Domine,

A praeclaris viris B. Brenninkmeyer et H. Könnemann  
excogitatum consilium inque libello, cui titulus "Projet  
de constitution de l'International Eidophon Maatschappij  
N.V." plane enucleatum commendaticiis litteris amplisque  
laudibus Sanctitati Suae studioso animo proferre contem=

disti.  
Augustus Pontifex hoc gratum habuit atque huiusmodi  
coeptis iam dehinc felicissima quaeque ominatur. Omni sane  
laude dignum est expolitioris humanitatis miris inventis  
sic uti, ut ad Dei gloriam proseguendam et ad christianam  
fidem confirmandam et dilatandam deserviant.

---

Exc.mo ac Rev.mo Domino  
D.no JOANNI H. JANSEN  
Archiepiscopo Ultraiectensi  
= ULTRAIECTUM =

---

Figure 8.1 Letter from Cardinal Pacelli to Monsignor J.H.G. Jansen, June 17, 1932.

Source: Archive of the Archdiocese of Utrecht.

Hoc non modo addecet, sed acerbitate temporum neces= sarium evadit, cum Dei hostes infensissimi cynematography= cis spectaculis, quibus addita vox efficacitatis plus tri= buit, nefario et impio ausu potiuntur, ut de hominum ani= mis quidquid est divinum et religiosum funditus convellant.

Quod si praevalida huiusmodi arma ii arripiunt qui de= votum gerunt in Deum et in Ecclesiam animum, rei catholicae magno erit emolumento et socialis apostolatus nova et prae= clara forma extabit.

Turmatim enim confluunt ad ludos id generis homines, prae fluentium imaginum visu et coniuncto sonitu vocis in= credibili modo allecti. Si ibidem res fidei et virtutum exempla spectanda exhibebuntur, tunc per oculorum auditus= que aditum illapsae species delectando mentes erudient et ad fortia exantlanda animos impellent.

Ideirco inito consilio prosperum secundumque exitum  
exoptat Beatissimus Pater atque universis qui, Ecclesiae  
praeceptis et monitis obsequentes, huic operi istituendo  
et perficiendo labores impendunt, divinorum auxiliorum  
conciliatricem Benedictionem Apostolicam impertit.

Haec tibi referens, qua par est observantia, me pro-  
fiteri gaudeo

Excellentiae Tuae

addictissimum

*E. Card. Tacchi*

These commendations from the highest church authority gave the founders a new courage and confidence in their venture. They immediately issued shares. Now the raising of capital from amongst the public could really get going. Starting on July 1, 1932, all Catholics were offered the opportunity to invest their savings in Eidophon with shares of 2500 guilders each or in certificates of 500 guilders.<sup>22</sup>

The issuing of shares proved to signal the start of a large fundraising campaign among Dutch Catholics. The clergy received instructions on how they could lend their “moral support” to this worthy cause. Deans could transfer funds from their church coffers to a special bank account for the purpose of purchasing shares; priests and monks even went from door to door to sell shares and certificates to faithful.<sup>23</sup>

The result was that by the end of 1932, the Eidophon advocates had managed to sell about 570,000 guilders’ worth of shares (227 or 228 shares—the exact number is not known). This was nowhere near the desired start-up capital of 850,000 guilders, but it was nonetheless a respectable amount. Where did the money come from? Who were these financiers? The following overview<sup>24</sup> shows who contributed to Eidophon’s capital:

Large shareholders	<i>f</i> 357,500
Convents	<i>f</i> 26,500
Catholic institutions	<i>f</i> 33,100
Private individuals	<i>f</i> 151,500
	<hr/> <i>f</i> 568,600

Part of this amount came from certificate holders: small investors who together raised 67,400 guilders.<sup>25</sup> Most of them lived in the Dutch provinces of Brabant and Limburg, and they included many pastors, chaplains and deans. “Large shareholders” refers to the founders of Eidophon, of which B.J. Brenninkmeyer was the most prominent; he owned ninety shares.

At the end of 1932, they were still 280,000 guilders short of the start-up capital they needed in order to be able to run Eidophon for the first year. To prevent the scheme from experiencing any further delays, and under the assumption that the rest of the money would come in over the course of the season, they decided not to wait any longer. They decided to get on with what the project was all about in the first place: producing sound films.

## GOOD FILMS

Eidophon was created to make films, Catholic films. What did they mean by it? This was not a new question in 1931; it was something that had been thought about, written about and talked about in Catholic circles for years, including at international congresses of the OCIC in The Hague, Munich

and Zurich (Chapters 1 and 2). The founding of Eidophon represented a significant moment in this international exchange of ideas, a real-life experiment from which conclusions could later be drawn.

After so many years of talking, the experiment's supporters wanted no more talk; they asked for action. Hermans was one of their proponents. He was a pragmatist and believed that everything would work out for Catholics, if the Church were only to obtain the use of its own means of production. As far as he was concerned, it was not necessary to exclusively make "Catholic propaganda films" in the future. He preferred promoting "good films in general." "Cinema, real cinema," he quoted the Belgian canon and OCIC's president Abel Brohée as saying, "should not reveal itself as being Catholic." "On the contrary," he continued, "its mission should be to carry the Church's influence where the priest cannot go: in this case to the Boulevard."<sup>26</sup>

What makes a film "good" can be assessed using both aesthetic and ethical criteria. When asked about this, Hermans indicated that he meant both. He wanted "good and wholesome films."<sup>27</sup> However, who didn't want that? The Catholic Church did not hold a monopoly on good films, so he avoided giving a more specific indication of criteria relating to what was Catholic.

The foundation plan did not say anything about the nature of the films that Eidophon was to produce either. The founders felt it was more important that the means of film production come into the hands of Catholics; the rest would resolve itself. Later, at the share issuance, they appeared to reveal a glimmer of what they had in mind: Eidophon was to make films

that faithfully reflected the lives and relationships of people, but in such a way that they can withstand the test of Christian morality. [. . .] If it is to be a Catholic undertaking in the broader sense, Eidophon will, in addition to strongly Catholic films, also have to release less overtly Catholic films [. . .]. If Eidophon only produces films that include the lives of saints, it would quickly spell the death of the company and make it impossible to make any serious films. Only the right balance and an exciting variety can promote the greater cause.<sup>28</sup>

As a young Catholic, the film critic van Domburg assumed a much more orthodox viewpoint, even if just to challenge his opponents. He did not explain what he understood by "Catholic films" himself either, but he reminded the Eidophon advocates of their Catholic pretensions. He felt that Eidophon was choosing to make big blockbusters without any specifically Catholic message—and moreover films without any artistic significance. Van Domburg wanted equally to keep both "the moral principle" and "the film principle" pure.<sup>29</sup> He therefore warned that this "film farm" could produce "undesirable films," "the kind of films that we have been scolding for years."

In our view, there is currently no place in public cinema for the Catholic cultural film. [. . .] How do they want to make the Eidophon films



profitable? The only obvious solution is to make films that just about everyone finds acceptable. However, then the Catholic cultural film is off the table, and there is no justification for collecting money for a company that is supposed to make Catholic films.<sup>30</sup>

The next question was: who would make the Eidophon films? Much to their disappointment, not one of the Dutch filmmakers qualified in the view of the founders. In vain the Catholic film collective Hinfilm tried to get a commission from Eidophon. Hinfilm consisted of the filmmaker Jan Hin, literary critic Albert Kuyle and film critic van Domburg. The latter did not shy away from openly demanding commissions from Eidophon in his columns: "What is needed is not a film factory, but money to support and afford a chance to film makers with any talent."<sup>31</sup>

In 1932, Hinfilm proposed to Eidophon that they work together on the production of a series of films, the "Eidophon Hinfilms." The proposal shows that Hinfilm also saw the Catholic community as a gap in the market, because "the Catholics from all over the world form a market that is already organized and is completely open."<sup>32</sup> Eidophon replied cautiously: they were not rejecting anything, but simply informing them that they needed people to assess film scripts.<sup>33</sup> After this, van Domburg held more meetings with Eidophon, but without any further results. Finally, Albert Kuyle offered a film script that he had written based on the novel by Anton Coolen, *Het donkere licht* (*The Dark Light*, 1929), but nothing came of that either.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Dutch film never in any way benefited from Eidophon.

Eidophon's sound films would all be shot in Germany. To this end, a subsidiary was founded in Berlin in 1932, Deutsche Eidophon GmbH. With capital of 400,000 marks, it was managed by Rudolf Beissel, Wilhelm Hübner and Josef Meyer. Originally, Eidophon wanted to make five big feature films and a few short ones that year. In the end, two feature films were completed: *Das Lied der Schwarzen Berge* (*Song of the Black Mountains*, Hans Natge, 1933) and *Das Meer Ruft* (*The Lake Calls*, Heinrich Köhler, 1933) and the documentary film *Rorate* (1933). The budget of these films is not known, but we do know that the first two were insured for 150,000 and 120,000 guilders, respectively<sup>35</sup>—amounts that correspond to the average cost of making a German feature film at the time.

On January 26, 1933, the gala premiere of *Das Meer Ruft* and *Das Lied der Schwarzen Berge* (of which only fragments were shown) took place at the Tuschinski Theater in Amsterdam. The theater was filled with the black and purple robes of the church authorities in attendance: Archbishop Jansen and Bishop Aengenent were given a place in the box of honor. By way of an introduction, George Mutsaerts explained once again that Eidophon's objective was to make films that did not offend any religious or ethical sensibilities. Other than that, they would be



*Figure 8.2* Heinrich George, left, in the first film produced by Eidophon, *Das Meer Ruft* (1933).

*Source:* Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.



*Figure 8.3* The Archbishop of Utrecht, Mgr. Jansen (with glasses), attends the premiere of *Das Meer Ruft* at the Tuschinski Theater on January 26, 1933. To his right is the Bishop of Haarlem, Mgr. Aengenent.

*Source:* Het Leven, Nationaal Archief/Spaarnestad Photo.

indistinguishable from other films. Only once the company had made enough money from the production of neutral films did Eidophon want to start making explicitly Catholic films. In van Domburg's view, as expressed in *De Nieuwe Eeuw* on February 2, 1933, this meant that if the company did not turn enough profits, *no* Catholic films would be produced. "Was it really necessary to put Dutch Catholics on high alert for this?" he asked.

Dutch film critics were not terribly impressed by either film, and did not waste many words on them, although there was some appreciation for Ernst Busch's and Heinrich George's acting in *Das Meer Ruft*.<sup>36</sup> Van Domburg



Figure 8.4 A.J. van Domburg (1895–1983).

Source: Author's personal archive.

is one of the few critics who wrote extensively about it. What particularly riled him was the tremendous timidity with which everything that looked Catholic was handled.

Hence at the end of the film we find ourselves in a church that could be either Catholic or Protestant, and we hear some sugary words spoken by a man who could be either a priest or a minister [. . .]. No matter how hard I try, I cannot understand a mentality like this, that wants its bread buttered on both sides, that whines about a Catholic film culture, that collects Catholic money, [. . .] and when it comes down to it avoids anything remotely Catholic, just to secure financial success.<sup>37</sup>

Van Domburg could regretfully state that he had been right and that his bleakest predictions had come to pass.

## DOWNFALL

These were the first and the last films that Eidophon was to make. There were still plans for other productions, but they came to nothing.<sup>38</sup> A few days after the festive gala premiere in Amsterdam, Hitler came to power in Germany, and the production and export of German films would soon experience a terrible stagnation. Berlin bowed out as an international production center for Catholic films, and no new candidates stepped up to take its place. However, the most important reason for failure was that Eidophon's finances just could not get off the ground. In 1933, Deutsche Eidophon Film GmbH was forced to cease its activities in Berlin. The Catholic film industry had once again locked itself up within national borders and within Catholic circles.<sup>39</sup> The Eidophon experiment had failed, and Könemann's invention was never even used.

Before the curtain finally fell, a desperate last attempt was made to avoid disaster. With the backing of a number of prominent Catholics, Eidophon approached the Dutch episcopacy to ask whether the bishops would underwrite a loan of 500,000 guilders.<sup>40</sup> It turned out that the bishops would consider underwriting the loan, "if Rome permits each diocese to withhold 10,000 guilders plus interest from the St. Peter Fund per year."<sup>41</sup> The St. Peter Fund was an annual voluntary collection in which the faithful gave money to support the pope. In effect, the Dutch bishops were seeking support for the requested underwriting from Rome. As a result, Eidophon themselves had to arrange for this permission.

In October 1933, Brenninkmeyer, Mutsaerts and Könemann travelled to Rome as pilgrims. It soon became clear that there were no objections to the episcopacy reserving an amount from the St. Peter's Fund for Eidophon, as long as there were no legal or moral guarantees associated with it. The Bishop of Haarlem, Monsignor Aengenent, also received a message

personally from Pope Pius XI. During an audience with Pius XI on November 2, 1933, the pontiff informed him that "he approved of the bishops of the Netherlands withholding part of the St. Peter's Fund in aid of Eidophon." Amounts were not mentioned. However, he did say that while "it should not be considered a donation given by him to Eidophon," he would, "be content if less was returned to him."<sup>42</sup>

Back in the Netherlands, the finishing touches could now be added to the national church's rescue plan. C&A would lend 368,000 guilders to the bishops, and they would deposit the money with a trustee, who in turn would lend the money to Eidophon under his own name. As a guarantee for the credit, Pius XI granted permission for 50,000 guilders to be withheld from the St. Peter's Fund in case Eidophon could not meet its obligations.<sup>43</sup> This arrangement does not take away from the fact that the entire church hierarchy from top to bottom, from pope, curia and cardinals to bishops, deans, priests and chaplains had become directly involved with Eidophon, first simply by offering moral support, and now also through financial backing.

The rescue plan folded at the last minute. It is unclear what the exact reasons were, but presumably it finally hit home that Eidophon was a lost cause and that it could not be rescued by a loan. Under pressure from his family, Brenninkmeyer left Eidophon and transferred his shares to C&A. In March 1934, C&A informed the other shareholders that it intended to dissolve Eidophon. The clothing company saw it as a bounden duty to compensate all shareholders (who had invested in Eidophon partly on B.J. Brenninkmeyer's instigation) by buying back all the outstanding shares and certificates.<sup>44</sup> As the sole shareholder, C&A then liquidated Eidophon.

## CONCLUSION

Despite its failure, Eidophon occupies a unique place in the history of the Catholic Church's efforts to engage with film. The company wanted to provide the Catholic Church with its own film production company, which would make "wholesome" talking pictures for an international audience on a for-profit basis. It was not the company's primary objective to preach the Catholic faith by means of film, but to place film production in the hands of Catholic entrepreneurs. They quietly hoped to net an international audience of hundreds of millions of Catholics, in addition to the general market. This approach received the support of wealthy Catholics in the Netherlands, and from the highest office-holders in the Catholic Church. Apparently, the latter group had enough faith in the spiritual motives and the commercial approach of the former.

Without the new sound film technology, they would probably never have managed to drum up as much support for film in influential circles. Around 1930, 'sound film' was a considered a magic word that appealed

to the imagination and preoccupied people throughout the world. The new technology had caused the international film industry to splinter in 1929, and the biggest electronic companies in the world fought over the scraps. It was a period in which there was a great deal of uncertainty and confusion about how the medium would develop in the future. In this temporary state of chaos, some thought they could take advantage of the situation to claim a share of the film market. The Catholic clergy, too, allowed themselves to be seduced by the issues of the day, and by Könemann's invention in particular.

Könemann's patent, promoted by Father Hyacinth Hermans as a "golden opportunity for a Catholic film cartel," was grotesquely overestimated in importance. If it ever had any significance, it was lost in 1930, when the most important patent groups from America and Europe divided up the market for sound films among themselves, so that the role of Könemann and that of his invention was played out even before Eidophon was founded. Ultimately, Könemann only functioned as a mascot, and his invention only had any value as propaganda in the appeal for Catholic support.<sup>45</sup>

This brings us to Brenninkmeyer and his role in the history of Eidophon. Starting in 1926, he invested tens of thousands of guilders in Könemann's invention. Nonetheless, there is nothing to indicate that he had a Catholic objective in mind. On the contrary, in 1928, he tried to sell Könemann's patent to Tobis, but the transaction did not go through. It was only later, and when the patent had lost its value, that he emerged as the supporter of a Catholic film company that would be allowed to make use of the patent free of charge. At this point, he did not want to hear anything about this prior history. Instead, he portrayed himself as a Catholic benefactor and supported Eidophon with large sums of money until it really was not possible anymore. In the process, he lost a fortune.

Brenninkmeyer and his associates enjoyed the trust of Church authorities, not only in the Netherlands, but also in the Vatican. Pope Pius XI lent his official endorsement to the Eidophon project; moreover, as pope, he granted permission for them to secretly use funds from the Vatican to cover Eidophon's financial shortfalls. The Vatican had probably never ventured this far into the area of film production before. Before Rome had to actually intervene financially, Eidophon was liquidated.

Eidophon could be pushed through thanks to Brenninkmeyer's contacts and influence. This does not mean that nobody from the Netherlands or abroad warned against the way in which Eidophon operated. In fact, there was no shortage of criticism.<sup>46</sup> The discussion around Eidophon seems to have been a symptom of a more general difference of opinion within the Catholic Church, where various schools of thought openly challenged one another. Film was just one of their many battlegrounds. Across the board, Eidophon's supporters were conservative minded, and they were particularly concerned with the expansion of Catholic influence in the film industry. Their opponents, however, pleaded for a more open approach to film as an art form.

After Eidophon folded, some supporters tried to lay the blame with the initiative's opponents. Hyacinth Hermans, for instance, bitterly looks back on Eidophon as "this disillusionment in our lives." Filled with bitterness, the priest complains at how Eidophon's films were panned by the Dutch critics. He did not think much of the "so-called Catholic youth, and the gentlemen of permanent criticism, who always knew better."<sup>47</sup> Of course, this is an overestimation of film critic's impact. The explanation for Eidophon's downfall lies primarily with Eidophon itself. Its financing turned out to be a farce, its leaders had no experience in the international film industry and the films were poorly made. In addition, Eidophon experienced bad luck: the economic crisis and the rise of Hitler in Germany made international film production in Germany virtually impossible.

Did the Church learn a lesson from the Eidophon debacle? In 1936, the Encyclical *Vigilanti cura* was published, in which Pope Pius XI outlined a film policy for the Catholic Church. On the subject of international film production, the document is eloquently silent. However, Pius XI did plead for strong film organizations in each country. While he was not opposed to international consultation, he did not make any kind of recommendation for the international *making* of films, a precondition for a Catholic film industry. A company like Eidophon that aimed for continuity in Catholic film production and wanted to reach an international audience was never established again.

## NOTES

An earlier version of this article was published in K. Dibbets, *Sprekende films: de komst van de geluidsfilm in Nederland 1928–1932* (Amsterdam 1993), pp. 279–371. Translated by Annemarie van der Westhuisen.

1. Hermans, Hyacinth. "Nu of nooit meer . . . een prachtkans voor een katholiek filmkartel." *De Maasbode*, February 1, 1931.
2. For Dutch Catholics' attitudes regarding film, see Slot, Pim. 1991. "Een vloek en een zegen: de katholieken en film in Nederland tot 1940." in *Kunst en beleid in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 216–246.
3. Letter from H.W.A. Joosten, former archivist of the KRO, to Karel Dibbets, April 8, 1991.
4. One Dutch guilder in 1927 had the same value as ten US dollars in 2014. Hermans, Hyacinth. "Bij dr. Könemann." *De Maasbode*, February 19, 1931; *Stichtingsplan NV Eidophon* (1931), VI, 2–3 (Nijmegen Catholic Documentation Centre, KFA Archives 269).
5. A description of the Könemann system can be found in Mihály von Dénes. 1928. *Der sprechende Film*. Berlin: Krayn, 123–131. This explanation was largely taken over by A.J. Rozemeijer in *De Technische Gids* (Amsterdam: Diligentia) of December 30, 1931. Könemann registered three patents in the Netherlands (nrs. 17364, 28712 and 35796).
6. This is about 5 million US dollars in 2014.
7. Minutes of the board of directors of Tobis AG, Berlin. December 13, 1928 (German Bundesarchiv BArch, R 109 I/ 226). It challenges later claims that Brenninkmeyer refused an offer to sell the patent out of noble motives. Hermans, Hyacinth. "Naar een positieve filmactie (I)." *De Maasbode*, December 23,

- 1931; *Stichtingsplan NV Eidophon* (1931), II, p. 2; confidential memorandums concerning International Eidophon NV, 1931 (Archives of the Diocese of Den Bosch, KFA 3).
8. Dibbets, Karel. 1996. "The introduction of sound," in G. Nowell-Smith, ed. *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 214.
  9. Hermans, Hyacinth. "Nu of nooit meer . . . een prachtkans voor een katholiek filmkartel." *De Maasbode*, February 1, 1931.
  10. For a history of OCIC, see Bonneville, Leo. 1998. *Soixante-dix ans au service du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel*. Quebec: Organisation Catholique International du Cinéma.
  11. Letter from P.G.J. Stuijver Jr., quoted in the article by Hermans, Hyacinth. 1931. "Nu of nooit meer . . . nog eenmaal: een katholiek filmkartel." *De Maasbode*, February 19, 1931. Stuijver continued, "Although he is probably unaware of it, Father Hermans creates the impression in his article that he wants to push an invention at the expense of the ideal of a Catholic film production company. In his statement, he explains that he wants to make a Catholic film industry possible by means of the use of a new invention with regard to talking film. The inverse is in fact true: the use of this invention would be made possible by the creation of a Catholic film industry."
  12. *De Nieuwe Eeuw*, March 5, 1931. Dibbets, Karel. 2003. "Tobis, made in Holland." in Jan Distelmeyer ed., *Tonfilmfrieden—Tonfilmkrieg: die Geschichte der Tobis vom Technik-Syndikat zum Staatskonzern*. Munich: Edition text + kritik, 25–33.
  13. The bishop of Den Bosch, Mgr. A.T. Diepen, tried, for instance, to interest a Mrs. Bink-Boots in the plan. After "having been informed," however, she could not be brought on board. Letter from A. Bink-Boots to Mgr. A.T. Diepen, October 19, 1931 (archive of the Diocese of Den Bosch, KFA 3).
  14. The name "Eidophon" is a contraction of the Greek words "eidos" (form, image) and "phone" (sound).
  15. "Stichtingsplan" for Eidophon NV, I: 6.
  16. "Stichtingsplan" for Eidophon NV, VI: 1. Strictly speaking, it could be counted on that some revenue from film rental and the like would come in during the second half of the year. The need for capital in the first year was therefore actually somewhat less than stated.
  17. "Stichtingsplan" for Eidophon NV, II: 3.
  18. Records of the Chamber of Commerce, Amsterdam, no. 42035; Articles of Association of International Eidophon NV, in *Nederlandsche Staatscourant*, appendix, July 28, 1932.
  19. Hermans, Hyacinth. 1945. *Van mensen en dingen die mij voorbij gingen*. Gravenhage: Pax, 199.
  20. Letter from Mgr. A.T. Diepen to G. Mutsaerts, May 13, 1932 (archive of the Diocese of Den Bosch, KFA 3).
  21. Original quote in Latin. Letter from Cardinal Pacelli to Mgr. J.H.G. Jansen, June 17, 1932 (archive of the Archdiocese of Utrecht, box Film 1).
  22. Prospectus accompanying the issuing of shares in International Eidophon NV, June 29, 1932 (archive of the Diocese of Den Bosch, KFA 3). The share capital was divided into 20 priority shares, 440 registered shares and 220 bearer shares, each with a nominal value of 2,500 guilders, of which 16 priority shares and 138 registered shares were sold. The issue took place at par.
  23. Circular of the *Goed Volk Bureau* to the deans of the diocese of Den Bosch, October 15, 1932 (archive of the Diocese of Den Bosch, KFA 3). Rector I. Broekman sold shares to people in Den Bosch and surrounds (*De Tijd*, January 13, 1937). Father Hillebrandt also actively collected for shares (letter from J. van Domburg to Jan Hin, November 26, 1932; Jan Hin Archive, Hilversum).



24. Letter from Eidophon NV to T.H.A.M. van der Marck, secretary to the diocese of Roermond, May 3, 1933 (archive of the Diocese of Den Bosch, KFA 3).
25. List of Eidophon NV certificate holders, March 17, 1934 (Nijmegen Catholic Documentation Centre, KFA 128).
26. *De Maasbode*, February 1, 1931.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Prospectus accompanying the issuing of shares in International Eidophon NV.
29. Close-Up. "De strijd om de film," *De Nieuwe Eeuw*, July 23, 1931.
30. Close-Up. *De Nieuwe Eeuw*, August 4, 1932.
31. *De Nieuwe Eeuw*, July 23, 1931.
32. Letter from Hinfilm to H. Nelissen, May 1932 (Jan Hin Archive, Hilversum). Nelissen was a member of the supervisory board at Eidophon NV. According to the letter from Eidophon NV to the Dutch bishops dated April 14, 1933, Eidophon sought a market not only in the cinemas, but also in youth organizations and club buildings, in Roman Catholic schools and even in missionary posts (archive of the Diocese of Den Bosch, KFA 3). More about Hinfilm in Hogenkamp, Bert. 1988. *De Nederlandse documentaire film, 1920–1940*. Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 67–80.
33. Letter from H. Nelissen on behalf of International Eidophon NV to Hinfilm, June 1932 (Jan Hin Archive, Hilversum).
34. *NRC*, July 24, 1933. Albert Kuyle had left Hinfilm by then.
35. Statement of current insurance policies held by Deutsche Eidophon, January 12, 1933 (Nijmegen Catholic Documentation Centre, KFA archive 128).
36. Heinrich George and Ernst Busch were well-known actors who often played roles in social commentary and modernist films. George would go on to choose the Nazis' side in 1933, however, starting with his performance in *Hitlerjunge Quex*, while Busch went into exile.
37. *De Nieuwe Eeuw*, February 2, 1933.
38. Plans for films that were not realized included a film about drug smugglers (*Schatten über der Grenze*), a gangster film (*Schritte in der Nacht*), a film based on a novel by Paul Keller (*Waldwinter*) and a short feature film (*Das Mädchen ohne hundert Mark*). Schmitt, Heiner. 1977. *Kirche und Film: kirchliche Filmarbeit in Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis 1945*. Boppard: Boldt, 73.
39. Schmitt, 73.
40. Letter from Eidophon NV to the Dutch bishops, April 14, 1933 (archive of the Diocese of Den Bosch, KFA 3).
41. Minutes of meeting of the Dutch episcopacy, May 10, 1933 (archive of the Archdiocese of Utrecht, Congress of Bishops 3, 1933–1936). The Bishop of Breda, Mgr. Hopmans, was the only one who repeatedly stated that he did not want to assume any responsibility for Eidophon's debts.
42. Letter from Mgr. Aengenent to Mgr. J.H.G. Jansen, November 29, 1933 (archive of the Archdiocese of Utrecht, Film 1).
43. Letter from Mgr. J.H.G. Jansen to Pope Pius XI, December 1933; letter from G. Mutsaerts to Mgr. J.H.G. Jansen, January 9, 1934 (archive of the Archdiocese of Utrecht, Film 1).
44. Letter from A.E.M. Povel to Kantoor van Bewaring en Administratie NV, March 23, 1934 (archive of the Diocese of Den Bosch, KFA 3).
45. Könemann made the news one last time when he demonstrated a new invention. On December 7, 1933, he placed four large loudspeakers in the tower of the Magdalena Church in Amsterdam. Although the church did not have its own bells, on that day, the sound of bells could be heard from the tower, the sound of which had been recorded in the Benedictine convent in Beuron. *De Tijd*, December 7, 1933.

46. Besides the comments on the Eidophon plan mentioned previously, there was also the German priest Fr. Muckermann, SJ, one of the leaders of the OCIC, who saw nothing in the plan for a big Catholic film studio. In his view, Eidophon could have operated much more economically if it had commissioned the Ufa to make its films. Muckermann, Friedrich. 1973. *Im Kampf zwischen zwei Epochen: Lebenserinnerungen*. Mainz, 282.
47. Hermans (1945), 198–199.

## 9 Pius XII as Actor and Subject

### On the Representation of the Pope in Cinema during the 1940s and 1950s

*Federico Ruozzi*

#### PIUS XII, 'FROM MYTH TO HISTORY'<sup>1</sup>

Following the French Revolution, and particularly after the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), whose most notable decision was the definition of papal infallibility, the Catholic Church redefined the role of the pope. He was seen as the defender of Catholicity. This caused Catholics to develop a real devotion to him.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the ties between the pope and the faithful reached their climax during Pius XII's pontificate (1939–1958), and the release of two films both about and featuring him is not a coincidence: Romolo Marcellini's *Pastor Angelicus* (1942) and Romolo Marcellini and Giorgio Simonelli's *Guerra alla guerra* (1946) were both produced by the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico*, the Catholic Cinema Center (CCC). In fact, Luigi Gedda, president of the *Gioventù Italiana dell'Azione Cattolica*, the Italian youth of the Catholic Action (GIAC) and the CCC,<sup>3</sup> clearly had a strategy for the development of Catholic cinema.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, he had a strategy for portraying the public image of the pope and the Church,<sup>5</sup> claiming that “today there is a greater desire to see rather than read. We are a visual humanity.”<sup>6</sup>

In order to understand the construction of the positive portrayal of Pius XII in those years,<sup>7</sup> it is necessary to reflect on the role of cinema and television, which has been up to now disregarded by the historians of the Church. As a matter of fact, these media disseminated his words, his images and his behavior, thus cooperating in the creation, as I argue, of his ‘positive myth,’ an expression used by historiography, as opposed to the subsequent ‘negative myth,’ so as to define the celebrity of Pius XII during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>8</sup> As previously mentioned, a negative myth appeared in Italy and elsewhere after his death.<sup>9</sup>

However, according to Guittat-Naudin, the widespread criticism of the pope was “quickly stifled.” His positive image as a defender of the Italian people prevailed after Mussolini's fall, during a period of easy mythicization.<sup>10</sup> I think that the media played an important role, first in promoting and, second, in diming,<sup>11</sup> both of the divergent images of Pius XII.<sup>12</sup> Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to analyze the cinematographic sources, distinguishing when Pius XII was a willing subject (films) or a reluctant one of the filming (newsreels, news, live broadcasting), as well as when he had an active or passive role in front of the cameras. In fact, radio, cinema and

television can be said to have emphasized the role of the pope as a “player in the international scene.”<sup>13</sup>

## **PIUS XII, THE MEDIA SYSTEM AND THE AUDIOVISUAL SOURCES: VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY ACTOR FOR THE CAMERAS**

During his long pontificate, and particularly after the Second World War, Pius XII paid attention to everything that surrounded him so that his teachings actually covered an extensive variety of subjects. Obviously, he did not ignore the media system, which was rapidly extending its influence into all spheres of public life, and the importance of public opinion.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, I believe that an analysis of audiovisual practices involving the pope himself is more interesting than an analysis of the official texts on the media. Since the late nineteenth century, the Church had always subsidized a double level of intervention on cinema: moral and alert control and active participation. In this case, the audiovisual sources offer greater insights than the traditional documents, such as the Encyclicals or the speeches, because they better describe the image of the Church, Pius XII himself and his public reception.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, if a letter is different from a diary and an Encyclical is not a decree, we similarly have many different typologies of audiovisual sources featuring Pius XII, such as newsreels, documentaries, films and television images.<sup>16</sup> And this is why we can define Pius XII as a real modern-media pope.<sup>17</sup>

## **RELUCTANT ACTOR: THE NEWSREELS**

There are hundreds of different newsreels, the forerunner of the modern television news, on Pius XII, in which he appeared as an involuntary performer, as a subject of the news: they were mostly shown in cinemas before the main feature films, and were produced directly by the Luce Institute. They cover all the years of his pontificate, with short sequences on his different activities. As a matter of fact, one of the editors and cameramen of *Pastor Angelicus*, Marcello Baldi, writes in his memoirs that “during papal audience, I was always in front of the pope, with my camera”<sup>18</sup> because of people’s “strong desire to view films of this nature—particularly those which concern the documentation of papal events or ceremonies.”<sup>19</sup>

Many of these were produced in collaboration with the CCC,<sup>20</sup> mainly for the most important religious festivities or the most important moments of ecclesiastical life.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes, short documentaries were directly produced by the CCC, but were not always well received abroad.<sup>22</sup>

Newsreels like *Cinegiornale Luce B* and *C* and *Luce Nuova* document the life of the pope, but many other newsreels were also issued: the pope, for example, appeared in *Combat Film* on the liberation of Rome in 1944 and in a short film in which he blessed the Allied troops. He then appeared in Italian

newsreel series such as *La settimana Incom* at the end of the war, in *Mondo Libero* in the 1950s or in *L'Europeo Ciac*, *L'orizzonte cinematografico*, *Settimanale Ciac* and *Caleidoscopio Ciac* in the last years of his pontificate.

Yet, the very first documentary, released in March 1939, is on the conclave and his election.<sup>23</sup> It shows images of Pius XII coming out and standing on the balcony for the first time (March 2, 1939). The audio of the crowd in St. Peter's Square, which cheered as soon as the name of 'Eugenio' was heard, before his surname was pronounced, underlines that he was already a celebrity. Similarly, images of the coronation ceremony (March 12, 1939) reveal the decision to celebrate this event for the first time in the open loggia of St. Peter's Square instead of inside St. Peter's Basilica, given the large number of the Catholic faithful who had arrived in Rome to attend it.<sup>24</sup>

In general, all these sources are an official album of brief sequences of the traditional activities carried out by the pope: discourses, celebrations, blessing, official visits, public audiences, the opening of the Holy Year in 1950 and of the Year of Mary in 1954, beatifications and canonization ceremonies and inaugurations until his funeral in October 1958.



Figure 9.1 People mourning at Pius XII's funeral.

Source: *Archivio Rodrigo Pais – Unibo – Ceub*.



Figure 9.2 Journalists were waiting for the transit of Pius XII's remains.

Source: Archivio Rodrigo Pais – Unibo – Ceub.

One of the sources is particularly valuable: the newsreel on the visit to the quarters of Rome bombed by the American army, on July 19, 1943. The narrator, referring to these images, says that it was a “unique moment for its touching simplicity. The pope is among the people, travelling unescorted.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1943, the myth of Mussolini, as perpetuated by the Luce Institute, was put to an end because of the dramatic situation due to the war and then to the fall of Mussolini's government and the subsequent political change in the country.<sup>26</sup> For example, the Ministry of Popular Culture asked photographers to avoid taking pictures of Mussolini alone, preferring the Duce to be portrayed with the masses.<sup>27</sup> As a result, King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy and the pope became the focus of attention. In fact, after a veiled censorship of the pope's Christmas radio message on peace (1942) and the cool reception of *Pastor Angelicus* by the regime, it is no coincidence that Pius XII was frequently seen in the media in that period: as already observed, in July 1943, after the bombing of Rome, many minutes were dedicated to the papal visit to the Roman quarters and, in September, a large section in

the newsreels was reserved for his peace message.<sup>28</sup> All these documents are important because they helped to construct the public image of Pius XII and to establish his relationship with the public.

Even foreign newsreels shifted their attention on the pope: for example, the famous and spectacular newsreel series produced in the United States in 1935 by Louis de Rochemont, *The March of Time*,<sup>29</sup> devoted many short films to Pius XII, such as *The Vatican of Pius XII* broadcast in 1940.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the Catholic journalist of *Time-Life*, Emmet Hughes, while describing in his newsreel the Italian political and economic situation and the Communist party, spoke about the pope.<sup>31</sup> In 1950, *The March of Time* produced *The Holy Year at the Vatican* (October 1, 1950), a feature film showing a variety of rare locations within Vatican City and St. Peter's Basilica, as well as the opening of the Holy Door and the pilgrims during the Jubilee celebrations.<sup>32</sup>

Pius XII was the first pope to have enjoyed such a high popularity among both Catholics and non-Catholics, in Italy and abroad. For many centuries, believers did not know what any pope looked like and had to rely on iconographical images.<sup>33</sup> Newsreels were the first audiovisual documents that contributed to showing the pope to the world and simultaneously creating the myth of Pius XII.<sup>34</sup>

## WILLING PERFORMER: DOCUMENTARIES AND THE FILM

Although Pius XII was an involuntary performer in newsreels since he was the passive subject of the filming, he was also a protagonist, both willingly and actively, in two films: *Pastor Angelicus* (1942), a title that derives from Malachia's prophecy, and *Guerra alla guerra* (1946), both directed by Romolo Marcellini and produced by the CCC. He became the first pope in Church history, particularly in the twentieth century, to be an actor in a film, and as a willing performer, he was able to present himself to the world.

These two films develop the religious theme (1942–1952) in Marcellini's extensive cinematography, after dedicating many years to war documentaries (1936–1942),<sup>35</sup> which served as propaganda for the Fascist regime. His use of archival footage, a significant peculiarity of his cinema, and spectacular shoots, such as air shots, made him an important exponent of the epic documentary genre in Italy. In particular, *Pastor Angelicus* marked “a moment of passage from a period in which he was a ‘Regime director’ to subsequent ones in which he demonstrated a strong interest in nature, human being and the adventure.”<sup>36</sup>

*Pastor Angelicus* was the first production that was totally in line with the new cultural and cinematographic strategy of Luigi Gedda, a first step moving “cautiously towards a Catholic production.”<sup>37</sup> Gedda would describe it as “the first Christian and significant engagement in the cinema after *Vigilanti cura*.”<sup>38</sup> In Catholic cinema circles, there were great expectations

regarding the outcome of this film,<sup>39</sup> and it was driven by intense public debate.<sup>40</sup>

Hence, the enthusiasm for the film was great.<sup>41</sup> In a letter sent to the cardinals for its first release, Gedda wrote that “yesterday I learned of a person who had distanced himself from religious practices and, after seeing *Pastor*, decided to return to the commandments. Deo gratias!”<sup>42</sup>

Gedda had wanted to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pius XII’s ordination as a bishop by writing a script for a film on the pope’s life. The sacerdotal jubilee or the episcopal one were often an occasion for rallying around the pope, and in the 1940s, the motion picture could be a great way to celebrate it.

The film is divided into two parts. The first part used footage from the Luce Institute archives to trace the journey of Card. Pacelli from Pius XI’s funeral to his election, and included a brief photographic story of his ecclesiastical career. In the second part, the troupe of twenty-five cameramen entered the Vatican and followed Pius XII’s activities for many months: the pope at work in his office, during public and private audiences and during his daily walk. Consequently, Marcellini and the scriptwriters were forerunners of the many ‘one day with the pope’ features that were published a decade later by a large number of illustrated religious and nonreligious magazines.

Having been supported by the regime during the preparation phase and its launch,<sup>43</sup> *Pastor Angelicus* was then subjected to the opposition of the Fascist authorities because “Mussolini was extremely unhappy about any public manifestation of the papal charisma.”<sup>44</sup> Speaking about its reception, the American Jesuit Vincent McCormick noted at that time that the “pope became too popular, it is said: it occasioned shouts for peace.”<sup>45</sup> The film is not directly critical of Mussolini or his totalitarian regime by standing up for the freedom of the people against the oppression, but it offered a simple proposal—replacement with another and new myth:

We do not think we are wrong in stating that the secret intention of the CCC, and particularly of its President, in creating the film on Pius XII was primarily to create the myth of Pope Pacelli in order to distance them from the twenty-year myth of the Fascist leader (‘Duce’). And this was not done for foolish anti-totalitarian ambitions but because the currently meaningful circumstances—which marked the end of the Man of Providence—led men like Mr. Gedda, full of extremist intentions, to plan impossible returns to a past of pontifical supremacy. The neo-Guelph Italy of the post-war period would not only have recognized its Saviour, but also its Restoring Agent and new Guide, in the *Pastor Angelicus*.<sup>46</sup>

According to Pollard “*Pastor Angelicus* effectively prepared the ground for Pius XII’s emergence as the key personality in Italy after Mussolini’s fall.” As a result, if *Pastor Angelicus* was a “mediocre film in terms of art,”



it managed, however, to attain its principal political objective: papal propaganda, in order to shape the image of the new guide, in particular, for Italian society.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the film was shown again on another difficult and significant occasion, that is, the tight Italian election campaign in 1948, in which it was used as an anti-Communist message, not only in the cinemas, but also in the streets, thanks to a sort of 'travelling cinema': projectors were installed inside vans provided by the Vatican itself.<sup>48</sup> The 1948 elections were the first after the Second World War in Italy, and the Catholic masses, encouraged by Gedda and his Civic committees, mobilized to vote for the Christian Democratic party against the Socialist and Communist alliance. Once more, Gedda and the audiovisual image of Pope Pacelli played together in order to steer Italian society. It should be underlined that anti-Communist propaganda was the unique and significant political strategy adopted by the Christian Democratic party for many years in order to gain votes during the pre-electoral phase.

There was a precise strategy, not only to increase screening in Italy, but also to export the film to foreign countries after its first release in December 1942.<sup>49</sup> In Italy, for example, we have some information on the promotions made by the CCC, thanks to a report written by Gedda at the end of the production of the film; it tried to show *Pastor Angelicus* in every city and, in particular, in the dioceses with private and public presentations, both for the people and for the curia.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, in March and May, the CCC exported the film to Spain,<sup>51</sup> Switzerland, Bulgaria, Romania and then to the mission countries;<sup>52</sup> then to Hungary and France (more than 210 showings were organized in Paris over six weeks).<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, the CCC was waiting for approval from the German censorship to export it to the 'occupied territories'.<sup>54</sup> Thanks to Chapel Film, *Pastor Angelicus* was then shown in the United States (for example, at the Republic Theatre of New York, on December 19, 1946, and in Boston) with the title *The Story of the Pope*. The American version included an introduction by Cardinal Spellman and the cooperation of Fulton Sheen (the first Catholic televangelist). The *New York Times* highlighted the new possibility opened by this medium: "watching *The Story of the Pope* could replace a pilgrimage in Rome."<sup>55</sup> As Thomas J. Fitzmorris wrote,

The only defect which damages the religious films of Hollywood is that they are not at all religious. This can be noted by watching the film, *The Story of the Pope*, a film which provides men with a spiritual message of unusual power. It is a documentary which illustrates a doctrine.<sup>56</sup>

In 1948, the CCC was proceeding with the subtitled Japanese version as well, according to the secretariat of state.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, the image of the pope was seen outside of the Vatican state—in which the pope was confined after 1870, after the loss of his temporal power—reaching believers all over the world, a 'great public audience' that everyone from different parts of the world could participate in.

The other important film with Pius XII as the protagonist was *Guerra alla guerra*—recently restored<sup>58</sup>—and which was directed by Romolo Marcellini and Giorgio Simonelli in 1946.<sup>58</sup> Cesare Zavattini was one of the scriptwriters, together with Diego Fabbri, Carlo Musso and Simonelli. This time, the film was produced by Orbis Film—the first relevant attempt at a Catholic film production company, created by Gedda and Fabbri in 1943–1944—and directed by Salvo D'Angelo.<sup>60</sup> If *Pastor Angelicus* laid the foundations for the beginning of the Orbis, this film marked its end; the production company was actually closed because of economic reasons and budgetary problems. Yet, it opened a new phase in the filmography of Marcellini. While Italy was undergoing a new phase of reconstruction, the director began to concentrate his attention on different themes, such as the economic boom, the conditions of women, etc.<sup>61</sup>

In particular, if *Pastor Angelicus* introduced the life of the pope and answered the question ‘what does a pope do all day?’ *Guerra alla guerra* presents the pope to the world as the great ‘defender of civilisation’ (*defensor civitatis*) against the war, in line with the contemporary Catholic rhetoric and with the teaching of the Holy See on the theme of war and peace:<sup>62</sup> war was seen as a God’s punishment to people, who had not followed the pope’s teachings. The film rhetorically “illustrates the relief efforts made by the Holy Father during the recent conflict.”<sup>63</sup> The pope is thus presented as “a living saint,”<sup>64</sup> and as a unique and real guide for achieving peace. As *Famiglia Cristiana*—the most important Italian Catholic weekly<sup>65</sup>—wrote in 1948:

Without the pope, men and nations are atoms, shards of humanity without history, without a past, a present or a future. [. . .] Liberty, progress, peace, civilization with the pope; or without Him the servitude of the spirit which leads nations to decay and ruin.<sup>66</sup>

In this way, the cinematographic productions became one of the means used to promote the papal model in the twentieth century.<sup>67</sup> As the judgment of the CCC underlines:

The effective description of the evils of war, alternated with visions of peace and charity, as well as the illustration of the works done by the Church under the energetic and inspiring guide of the pope, make this film an eminently constructive work, and induces us to recommend it to everyone. The film may also be shown in parish cinema halls.<sup>68</sup>

But the Catholic reception of the film, especially abroad, was not always so enthusiastic. The official review published by the International Catholic Organization for Cinema (OCIC) (see Chapters 1 and 2) was quite critical:

The film is biased and forgets to mention the rescue efforts of many other countries and organizations (e.g., the International Red Cross).

As a result, and particularly for a cynical spirit, it gives the pathetic impression of a pro domo apologetic work.<sup>69</sup>

Shooting began in April 1946, and the film was released in June 1947 after an extensive planning, according to Emilio Lonero and Aldo Anziano, who wrote the history of *Orbis-Universalis*. It came out before the premiere of *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles*), directed by Visconti for *Universalis*, which successfully picked up Orbis' baton. However, the CCC organized a preview of the film on January 15, 1948, and released it in Italy (by means of C.E.I.A.D. Columbia) during Easter.<sup>70</sup> The Civic committees were in charge of the film's propaganda in the cities.

The project for this second film about the pope's mercy, following the success of *Pastor Angelicus*, underwent many transformations. At the beginning, the title of the film should have been *Sulla carità del papa*,<sup>71</sup> thus focusing on the Pope's charity, and was finally changed into *Guerra alla guerra*, revising another different and older project from 1945 titled *Consolazione*.

The documentary has a narrative construction similar to that of *Pastor Angelicus*. Many footage sequences are used, but, unlike *Pastor Angelicus* and unlike what D'Angelo had promised,<sup>72</sup> there are no new and exclusive sequences with the pope, as Gerog Gerster had also noted in the *Revue Internationale du Cinéma*.<sup>73</sup> As a matter of fact, the Holy See did not allow them. The evangelical sequences written by Zavattini were also cut in the final version because they were considered not in line with the idea of the film.

This analysis of *Pastor Angelicus* and *Guerra alla guerra* shows how, in the 1940s, Italian cinema and motion pictures in general contributed to build the public image of the pope by using the pope himself as a public and universal icon. The climax of this parabola is the documentary *Anno santo 1950*<sup>74</sup> in which, together with the ceremonies and the traditional rituals and liturgies, we can see how the Catholic faithful came to Rome on pilgrimage from every corner of the world, emphasizing the universality of the Church and crowning Pius XII as the modern pope of the masses.<sup>75</sup> It was a great opportunity to visually show the level of devotion for the pope.

As a side topic, but nonetheless relevant to the two films here under analysis, is another documentary, released by Opus Film without any year of reference and titled *Uomini della pace*.<sup>76</sup> Once again, Romolo Marcellini was the director and once again, the pope was the protagonist: he speaks to believers during some solemn liturgical celebrations.

Notwithstanding the lack of information on these documentaries, they are important because they again present the pope as a world peace figure. Consequently, while Vatican Radio broadcasted the voice of the pope all over the world, cinema was now bringing the image of the pope directly into every city. Actually, by means of these movies, the 'positive myth' of Pius XII and his popularity, analyzed by historiography, crossed Italian borders.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter shows how the ‘positive myth’ of the pope was created by cinema in 1940–1950 and the active participation of Pius XII in this process. Pius XII was the pope of the masses because, unlike his predecessors, he established a direct dialogue with believers, thanks to the new technologies of mass communication.<sup>77</sup> His understanding of the importance of cinema, television and the mass media in general enabled him to disseminate his image all over the world at a time when there was a strong desire to create Catholic cinema productions. Oliver Logan observed that “the elements of a personality cult can already be seen immediately following Pius XII’s election in March 1939,” although he noted that “the year 1942 witnessed an intensification of the personality cult,”<sup>78</sup> as a product of supporting the pope’s role as a teacher. Logan concentrates his analysis on the Christmas broadcasts of 1941 and 1942, in which Pius XII tried to make “the papacy a player in the international scene.”

As demonstrated, in building the personality cult of the pope, film productions such as *Pastor Angelicus* (right in 1942!) also played an important role. In fact, what connects all these films in different ways is the triumph of the Church. Logan believes that “in 1943–1944 came a series of highly emotive contacts between the pope and the Roman populace which are to become key episodes in the mythology of Pius XII and to be portrayed as cementing the intimate relationship between him and the Roman people.”<sup>79</sup> Examples include his visit to the war-damaged quarters of Rome and his mass audience for the refugees. At the same time, the different audiovisual images extended and cemented the relationship between the pope and believers around the world.

These images played a complementary role in what Logan considers one of the themes in the “dramatization of the encounter between pontiff and masses”:<sup>80</sup> the physical frailty of his figure. For Logan, the pope’s appearance of physical frailty conveyed an impression of positive fragility, brushing up the cult of the pope as a victim and persecuted by an anti-clerical society. As a result, we can understand how relevant it was to reveal and emphasize the images of his physical appearance, as well as his diaphanous figure, his illness and all the semantic elements here evoked, thereby generating the “suffering iconography”<sup>81</sup> associated with Pope John Paul II.

*Pastor Angelicus* is even more important when compared to a similar document: in fact, Italian television realized a similar program in 1959 for the new Pope John XXIII (1958–1963), *La giornata del papa* (1959),<sup>82</sup> a sort of remake of *Pastor Angelicus*. The locations were the same in which Pope Pacelli had lived, but these two documents are completely different. And the difference in the documents depends on the different personalities of these two popes: Pius XII was more cinematographic, more distant, while Pope John XXIII was more televisional, and thus, somehow closer.

John XXIII paid less attention to form: he blew his nose in front of the cameras, he touched his forehead and his ears and so on. This different way of presenting themselves reveals different methods of communication of the two popes: the aim of Pius XII was spiritual propaganda, accomplished in an ingenious manner. He was the first Church leader able to establish a direct relation with the masses through cinema, radio and television. According to Grasso,<sup>83</sup> he was comparable to John Paul II, with his charisma and strong personality.<sup>84</sup> On the contrary, the aim of John XXIII was a simple *communicatio*, such as the approach developed by the present pope, Francis (2013–). So the consensus that the two popes reached and the times are also different: Pius XII was speaking to nations shattered by the Second World War, while Pope John XXIII tried the *aggiornamento* (an update) of the Catholic Church to modern times.

In conclusion, the relationship between the pope and the audiovisual mass media are an important category of analysis because cinema and television, as Pollard writes, “became for the papacy another way of developing the ‘cult of the personality’ around the pope.”<sup>85</sup>

## NOTES

1. Traniello, Francesco, 1984. “Pio XII dal mito alla storia,” in Andrea Riccardi, ed. *Pio XII*. Rome: Laterza, 5–29. All the quotations (volumes and archives) are translated from Italian into English in order to facilitate their comprehension.
2. See Pietro, Scoppola, 1991. “Gli orientamenti di Pio XI e Pio XII sui problemi della società contemporanea,” in *Storia della Chiesa*, XXIII. Cinisello Balsamo (MI): Paoline, 129–159. For the devotion to the pope, see Zambarbieri, Annibale. 1990. “La devozione al Papa,” in *Storia della Chiesa*, XXII/2. Cinisello Balsamo (MI): Paoline, 9–81 and Rusconi, Roberto. 2010. *Santo Padre. La santità del papa da San Pietro a Giovanni Paolo II*. Rome: Viella.
3. For a detailed examination of the figure of Luigi Gedda, see Preziosi, Ernesto, ed. 2013. *Luigi Gedda nella storia della Chiesa e del Paese*, Rome: Ave, and his memoirs Gedda, Luigi. 1998. *18 April 1948. Memorie inedite dell'artefice della sconfitta del Fronte Popolare*. Milan: Mondadori.
4. Gedda notes that “This task seemed quite light in an age in which television did not exist and there was a need to provide a visual representation of the life of the Church” (Gedda, 1998: 73).
5. See Aubert, Roger. 1979. “Il mezzo secolo che ha preparato il Vaticano II” in *Nuova storia della Chiesa: 5/II. La Chiesa nel mondo moderno*. Turin: Marietti, 39. See Gedda, Luigi. “Pensiamoci.” *Rivista del cinematografo*, 12 (1941): 161.
6. Gedda, Luigi. 1941. “Conclusioni” in *Il volto del cinema*. Rome: AVE.
7. See Guittat-Naudin, Muriel. “Les silences de Pie XII. Entre mémoire et oubli 1944–1958.” *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 106, no. 1 (2011), 215–239.
8. Persico, Alessandro A. 2008. *Il caso Pio XII. Mezzo secolo di dibattito su Eugenio Pacelli*. Milano: Guerini e Associati.
9. See the case of Rolf Hochhuth's play, *Der Stellvertreter (The Deputy, A Christian Tragedy)*, Berlin 1963, on the silence of the pope on the Shoah. Costa-Gavras based his film *Amen* (2002) on this subject. See also Guittat-Naudin (2011: 215) and Miccoli, Giovanni. 2007. *I dilemmi e i silenzi di Pio XII. Vaticano, Seconda guerra mondiale e Shoah*. Milan: Bur.

10. Guittat-Naudin, 2011: 217; Traniello, 1984: 6.
11. For more on the concept of "dimming" (Logan, 1998: 7).
12. Marazziti, Mario. 1990. *I papi di carta. Nascita e svolta dell'informazione religiosa da Pio XII a Giovanni XXIII*. Genoa: Marietti.
13. Logan, 1998: 241. Cinema was not the only medium that was involved in spreading the audiovisual image of Pius XII. In fact, television also facilitated the spreading of the image of the pope, not only all over the world, but right inside the home. For example, Father Pichard succeeded in recording a papal discourse which was then broadcast during Easter 1949.
14. See Marazziti, 1990: 3–46.
15. See Viganò, Dario E. 2006. "Il cinema di Pio XII," in Ruggero Eugeni, D.E. Viganò, eds. *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*, Rome: Eds, 209–221; De Marco, Vittorio. 2005. "Il contesto socio-politico dei due Discorsi," in Dario E. Viganò ed., *Pio XII e il cinema*. Rome: Eds, 18–34.
16. See Melloni, Alberto. 2006. "Lo storico e la fonte televisiva," in Aldo Grasso, ed. *Fare storia con la televisione*. Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 129–140.
17. See Viganò, Dario E. 2010. "Pio XII, i media e la comunicazione," in Philippe Chenaux ed., *L'Eredità del Magistero di Pio XII*. Vatican City: Lateran University Press-Gregorian & Biblical Press, 141–182 and Id. 2002. *Cinema e Chiesa*. Turin: Effatà.
18. Giraldi, Massimo and Bove, Laura, eds. 2011: 17. Baldi, Marcello. *Cinema, cattolici e cultura in Italia*. Trento: Quaderni di Archivio Trentino. See also Laura, 2004: 203–221.
19. See the document on the CCC conserved in Archivio dell'Istituto per la storia dell'Azione cattolica e del movimento cattolico in Italia Paolo VI, Rome [Isacem], fondo Azione Cattolica Italiana—Presidenza generale [Aci—Pg], XV, 3, 3.
20. See Isacem, Aci—Pg, XV, 2, CCC 1933–1939.
21. Archivio Storico Luce [ASL], *Il solenne rito papale in Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in onore di San Francesco d'Assisi e Santa Caterina da Siena patroni d'Italia*, a Vatican production realized by the CCC, 1939–1940, b/n, sound, 10' 35"; NL005, Notiziario n. 5 *Luce nuova*, special issue for the consistory, in collaboration with the CC, February 1946, b/n, sound, 8' 25".
22. Particularly due to the conflict with the American industrial society (Isacem, Aci—Pg, XV, 3, June 17, 1940).
23. ASL, D004802, *Il conclave e la elezione del Sommo Pontefice*, March 1939, b/w, 12' 11". Some newsreels show Pacelli before his election. For example, the images of the twenty-fourth Eucharistic Congress in Budapest (May, 25–29 1938) where Pacelli participated as *legato pontificio* are of interest (*Giornale Luce*, B1319, June 8, 1938. 'La comunione di 150.000 ragazzi').
24. ASL, D063401, Istituto Nazionale Luce, *L'incoronazione del sommo pontefice*, b/w, 19' 30".
25. ASL, D063004, Istituto Nazionale Luce, *Bombardamento della città del Vaticano*, b/w, 3' 31".
26. See Laura, 2004: 203–221. D'Autilia, Gabriele. 2005. "Il fascismo senza passione. L'Istituto Luce," in Giovanni De Luna, Gabriele D'Autilia and Luca Criscenti, eds. *L'Italia del Novecento. Le fotografie e la storia*, vol. I/1, Turin: Einaudi, 91–116.
27. Luzzatto, Sergio. 2005. "'Niente tubi di stufa sulla testa.' L'autoritratto del fascismo," in *L'Italia del Novecento. Le fotografie e la storia*, vol. I/1, Turin: Einaudi, 157. See also Musiedlak, Didier. 1991. "Le Duce, le balconi et la foule," in Françoise Liffra ed. *Rome 1920–1945. Le modèle fasciste, son Duce, sa mythologie*. Paris: Autrement, 133–143.
28. ASL, *Giornale Luce*, C0373, *Il papa parla al mondo*, b/w, sound, 2' 54".

29. During a business trip in the United States, Sandro Pallavicini was struck by *March of Time* and, when he came back to Italy, decided to create the Italian *Incom*. See Fielding, Raymond. 1978. *The March of Time, 1935–1951*. New York: Oxford University Press and Fielding, Raymond. 2006. *The American Newsreel: A Complete History, 1911–1967*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.
30. HBO archives, New York, *The Vatican of Pius XII*, volume 6, episode 7, February 1940, 17' 54".
31. HBO archives, *The Cold War: Act II—Crisis in Italy*, volume 14, episode 8, March 19, 1948, 16' 22".
32. HBO archives, *The March of Time—Non-Newsreel Productions*, 1h 05'.
33. See Ruozzi, Federico. 2011. "L'immagine del pontefice tra Otto e Novecento," in *Verde bianco rosso. Una fotografia dell'Italia*, Fotografia europea ed. Milan: Electa, 86–99. See also Rusconi, 2010: 455–601.
34. The first pope to be filmed on the motion picture camera was Leo XIII, in 1896 and in 1898.
35. See Cori, Alessandra. 2009. *Il cinema di Romolo Marcellini*. Genova: Le Mani and Marcellini, Romolo. 1938. "Lettera aperta a *Lo Schermo*." *Lo Schermo* 16, no. 10 (October 1938—XVI), 21.
36. Cori, 2009: 81.
37. "Cautamente, verso una produzione cattolica." *Rivista del cinematografo*, no. 5 (1943): 50.
38. See "Benedetta Celluloide," *Ciemme*, 138–139 (2002), 21.
39. As one can read in a confidential report in the CCC archives, "The *Pastor Angelicus* was a good opportunity [. . .] it may serve as a starting point for the solution of the significant production problem, a problem which we intend to tackle with prudence (if *Pastor Angelicus* is successful) but with determination [. . .] Moreover, *Vigilanti cura* has entrusted us not with the task of producing (CCC cannot become a producer) but with *promoting the production*. CCC, within the production sector, will remain limited to short films with Vatican and religious themes. [. . .] In addition, *Pastor Angelicus* (if the showing can at least be implemented in times that are not as gloomy as the current ones) will generate great economic advantages; as a result, the CCC can obtain an autarchy in the economic field. Some form of economic advantage seems, in any case, to be assured" (Isacem, Aci—Pg, XV, 3).
40. See, for instance, the debate on the pages of *La Rivista del cinematografo* in those years and the volume 1941. *Il volto del cinema*. Rome: AVE.
41. See Pollard, John. 2010. "Electronic pastors," in James Corkery and Thomas Worcester, eds. *The Papacy since 1500. From Italian Prince to Universal Pastor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 199.
42. Isacem, Aci—Pg, XV, 3.
43. Isacem, Aci—Pg, XV, 3.
44. Pollard, 2010: 198.
45. Originally in James Hennessey, *American Jesuit in Rome*, 37, now in Pollard, John. 2010. "Electronic pastors," in James Corkery and Thomas Worcester, eds. *The Papacy since 1500. From Italian Prince to Universal Pastor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 198.
46. Falconi, Carlo. 1956. *La Chiesa e le organizzazioni cattoliche in Italia (1945–1955)*. Turin: Einaudi, 268.
47. Pollard, John. 2010. "Electronic pastors," in James Corkery and Thomas Worcester, eds. *The Papacy since 1500. From Italian Prince to Universal Pastor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 198.
48. See Falconi, 1956. See Dagrada, Elena. 2013. "La forma della propaganda nei film prodotti dai Comitati civici (1948–1959)," in Ernesto Preziosi, ed. *Luigi Gedda nella storia della Chiesa e del Paese*. Rome: Ave: 205–216.

49. As Branca wrote in 1943, "Following the success of *Pastor Angelicus*, a movement towards films with religious and hagiographical themes began." Branca, Remo. "Cinema contro cinema," in *Rivista del cinematografo*, no. 2 (1943).
50. Enic had to organize private showings of the film for Italian bishops (Isacem, Aci—Pg, XV, 3).
51. See Sernesi, Silvano. "I film italiani in Spagna," in *La Rivista del cinematografo*, no. 3 (1947): 12.
52. Mons. Vincenzo Scuderi bought the English version of the documentary *La presa di possesso di S. Santità a S. Giovanni in Laterano*, and other films on Pius XII and Pius XI, for the Salesian mission in India (Isacem, Aci—Pg, XV, 3).
53. See *Rivista del Cinematografo*, no. 2 (1948): 3.
54. See the memorandum in Isacem, Aci—Pg, XV, 3.
55. *New York Times*, December 1946.
56. Di Graziano, "Il Pastor Angelicus in America," in *La Rivista del cinematografo*, no. 3 (March 1947): 5–7.
57. As the annual report drawn up by the Ente dello spettacolo on June 7, 1948, states (Isacem, Aci—Pg, XV, 3).
58. See, for example, Pellegrini, Luca. "Pio XII e il suo grido nel deserto," in *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 7, 2009.
59. In 1948, Simonelli filmed the antinazi farce *Accidenti alla Guerra!*
60. See Lonero, Emilio—Anziano, Aldo. 2004. *La storia della Orbis-Universalis. Cattolici e neorealismo*. Turin: Effatà.
61. See Cori, 2009.
62. See Minois, Georges. 1994. *L'église et la guerre. De la Bible à l'ère atomique*. Paris: Fayard; Menozzi, Daniele. 2008. *Chiesa, pace e guerra nel Novecento. Verso una delegittimazione religiosa dei conflitti*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
63. Lonero—Anziano, 2004: 107. For an analysis of war movies relating to the Church during the Second World War, see the chapter "Un conflitto fra Stato e Chiesa," in Argentieri, Mimmo. 1998. *Il cinema in Guerra. Arte, comunicazione e propaganda in Italia 1940–1944*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 234–268. See also the movies produced by the Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza ai Profughi.
64. Logan, 1998: 243.
65. A very interesting analysis by Cullen, Niamh, 2013. "Morals, modern identities and the Catholic woman: Fashion in Famiglia Cristiana, 1954–1968." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 18, no. 1 (2013): 33–52.
66. Menara, G. "Luce nel mondo." *Famiglia Cristiana*, June 27, 1948.
67. See the review of the film written by Vasile, Turi. "Guerra alla Guerra." *La Rivista del cinematografo*, no. 2 (1947): 5.
68. Now in "Benedetta Celluloide," *Ciemme*, 138–139 (2002): 86.
69. Gerster, Gerog. *Revue Internationale du Cinéma*, no. 3 (1949): 57–58.
70. Isacem, Aci—Pg, Attività del Centro cattolico cinematografico dall'ottobre 1947 al maggio 1948, June 7, 1948
71. *On the Pope's Charity* (my transl.).
72. As Lonero and Anziano wrote, "D'Angelo assured that there were twenty minutes of unedited scenes with the Holy Father that were ready and available, even making Orbis pay a certain amount, although nothing existed" (Lonero—Anziano, 2004: 105).
73. Gerster, 1949: 57–58.
74. *1950 Holy Year* (my translation), 1951, Filmoteca Vaticana.
75. Archivio Filmoteca Vaticana.
76. ASL, *Uomini della pace (Men of Peace)*, my translation), Opus, without date, b/w.



77. According to Marazziti, the complex relationship between the loneliness and hieratic nature of Pius XII, on the one hand, and the sea of people in St. Peter's Square, on the other, generated the myth of the perfect and modern pope (Marazziti, 1990: 7).
78. Logan, 1998: 240.
79. Logan, 1998: 241.
80. Logan, 1998: 243.
81. Marazziti, 1990: 25.
82. Archivio Teche Rai, R002135/00, 41' 44", directed by F. Schepis, with P. Josca, E. Luparelli, E. Ravel (1959).
83. See Grasso, Aldo. "Il pontificato giovanneo nel giornalismo televisivo." *Cristianesimo nella storia* 25, no. 2 (2004), 569–574.
84. See Dayan, Daniel-Katz, Elihu. 1992. *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
85. Pollard, 2010: 202.

## 10 The Failed Project of a Catholic Neorealism

On Giulio Andreotti, Félix Morlion  
and Roberto Rossellini

*Tomaso Subini*

This chapter examines the relationship between Giulio Andreotti and Father Félix Morlion, their involvement with the neorealist Roberto Rossellini and their ultimate failure to develop a ‘Catholic neorealism.’ Andreotti was undersecretary to the presidency of the Council of Ministers responsible for government intervention in film industry between 1947 and 1953, whose policy was closely linked to the Vatican’s interests. Father Morlion was a Belgian Dominican whose anti-Communist activity encouraged an ideological use of cinema. Andreotti assigned Morlion a key role in his policy aimed at moralizing neorealism, going as far as defending the Dominican’s action despite the disappointment of the pope himself.<sup>1</sup> Rossellini became involved with their aspirations for a Catholic neorealism, in spite of being considered scandalous by the Catholic Church due to his public love affairs, when they offered him a way to succeed in a changed political environment. Upon the recommendation of Morlion, and with the help of Andreotti’s institutional support, Rossellini directed two films on the occasion of the Holy Year in 1950. These two films—*Stromboli, terra di Dio* (*Stromboli*) and *Francesco giullare di Dio* (*The Flowers of St. Francis*)—were intended to establish a Catholic neorealism in its own right. Such a Catholic neorealism would meet with the approval of the Catholic Church and the Christian Democratic Party and offer an alternative to the neorealism Rossellini had helped develop. Furthermore, the Catholic critic Gian Luigi Rondi actively collaborated with the project by supporting the films with his reviews.

### A NETWORK OF FRIENDSHIPS AND ALLIANCES

In studying the profound connections between American and Vatican interests within the context of post-war Italian cinema, Daniela Treveri Gennari has shown that “the strong American attempt in terms of containment of Soviet power and the suffocation of the left in any country that expressed suggestion of political change towards that direction was clearly shared by the Vatican.”<sup>2</sup> This is the reason why, during a period of great political tension caused by the approaching elections of April 1948 and, more generally,

by the Cold War, the Church considered Morlion's activities positively (see also Chapter 15).

In 1944, the charismatic and energetic Morlion arrived in Italy from the United States with "some social and religious tasks"<sup>3</sup> entrusted to him by Luigi Sturzo, one of the founders of *Partito Popolare Italiano*, the forerunner of *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democratic Party, from now on DC), forced into exile with the rise of Italian Fascism. Morlion travelled with the support of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). He had the reputation of being an expert in psychological war and propaganda techniques. During 1944, Morlion met DC's leaders and made contact with the *Azione Cattolica Italiana* (Italian Catholic Action, ACI). The following year, with the support of Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini (Substitute for General Affairs to the Vatican Secretary of State), he founded *Università Internazionale di Studi Sociali Pro Deo* (International University of Social Studies Pro Deo), which soon became "the reference point for the ideological collaboration between the Vatican and the American government against the influence of Communism in Italy."<sup>4</sup> From the end of the war the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, from now on PCI) obtained a huge following among the workers and peasants. "In mid-1943 the PCI had a membership of approximately 5,000. During 1944 it expanded to 502,000. By the fifth congress of the party in December 1945 this figure reached 1,771,000."<sup>5</sup> Although the party was made up mainly of lower-class people, its Secretary Palmiro Togliatti sought to reach out to the middle class too. Trying to penetrate society in all its aspects, PCI came into conflict with the Church. In 1949, the Holy Office of the Vatican announced the formal excommunication of all Communist parties and their supporters. The extraordinary growth of PCI alarmed even Americans, who considered Italy their strategic base in Europe for fighting the Cold War and couldn't permit this nation to be under the influence of the Soviet Union.

Why would a man like Morlion, related to the world of secret services, develop an interest in cinema? Which use of the cinematic medium did he intend to implement? And which kinds of films interested him? Two unsigned documents, which were nonetheless written by the Dominican father immediately after "the solid achievement of the social-Communist forces in the June 1953 elections," help answer this question.<sup>6</sup> The first document reports on information gathered from a source (denominated as "our") who penetrated into the central headquarters of the PCI with the task of spying. Even though this is the only document of this type that I have found in the Dominican Archives, it is evident that we are not dealing with a one-time report. Its numbering suggests that the origin of such an informative service can be traced back eight years to 1945. The most alarming information contained in this report sounds like a warning: "The Communist Party is about to take a revolutionary action."<sup>7</sup> The second document reflects a reaction to the threat. It is a "plan to penetrate into the communist groups" during the two-year period

1953–1955.<sup>8</sup> This plan envisages an estimated expense of 40 million lire to finance a group of Pro Deo's former students with the task of forming and organizing "smart factory workers, who up to now have been inactive, but could become the natural leaders of a gradual anti-Communist action, that differs completely from political activity," that must be done in those "factories that are more threatened by communist propaganda."<sup>9</sup> In addition, according to Morlion, 22.5 million lire were needed to finance thirty "young social priests," who during their studies at the Pro Deo University were trained "to penetrate into families, to make contact with hesitant communists, and to instruct other priests for the same job."<sup>10</sup> Next to another budget for publishing activities (30 million lire), Morlion also asked for 20 million lire in order to finance a '*cineforum*' activity.<sup>11</sup>

The *cineforum* format, developed by Morlion in the war's aftermath and based on the 'presentation-discussion' formula, would spread extensively during the following thirty years, especially in northern cities like Milan.<sup>12</sup> In the aforementioned document, Morlion explains *cineforum*'s political aims:

Whilst communists are not influenced by church prayers, they cannot resist an invitation to a free of charge social film's screening [. . .]. In order to develop the *cineforum* movement, that is already expanding in every Italian region, we need at least eight specialized technicians on a contract of one million per year. To this we must add at least three vans equipped for projecting films in small villages and estimate the expenses for making copies of certain social (non political) films avoiding government documentaries, which initially could be counterproductive.<sup>13</sup>

In another important document, entitled *Conclusioni su un'azione decisiva per ridurre l'influenza comunista in Italia* (Remarks on a decisive action to reduce the Communist influence in Italy), Morlion explains how a *cineforum* should schedule "a great film after which our ideas gain a more concrete intensity thanks to discussions and explanations." Morlion added that "no (communist) branch chief can prevent his comrades from watching a free of charge screening," and also that "as it has been announced that a surprise film will be screened at the end, the public in practice is trapped by curiosity between two films."<sup>14</sup>

However, as we can see, not all kinds of films were considered an efficacious means of ideological propaganda. Morlion had learned from his experience that when a film was excessively biased, the spectator became suspicious and, instead of being off-guard, thus permitting the ideological invasion, he strengthened his defense. This is the reason why explicitly political films, such as 'government documentaries,' had to be avoided, in favor of 'social films,' like Rossellini's *Stromboli* for which Morlion developed an exploitation plan four months before the shooting began in April 1949, as depicted in a letter sent by Morlion to Manuel Suárez, the actual Dominican general minister.<sup>15</sup>

Pro Deo's film activities could rely on both the economical support from northern industrialists and on the help provided by Andreotti, who from June 1947 to July 1953 was responsible for government policy on cinema. An initial idea of how important the relationship between Morlion and Andreotti was can be gained by reading Andreotti's diaries from 1947 to 1949, which were published a few years ago.<sup>16</sup> These diaries contain telegraphic notes about the Dominican, which demonstrate a friendship, and almost an affiliation, between the two. In particular, a significant page written on December 4, 1949, where Andreotti uses a plural pronoun ('we' instead of 'they') suggests that he considered himself part of the Dominican circle:

The 'Crociata della Bontà' by the Jesuit Father Lombardi continues. Some consider Pro Deo's programmes a counter attraction. We don't incorporate ourselves.<sup>17</sup>

Andreotti stated that he gave lessons in journalism at the Pro Deo and took part in groups of analysts who studied the current political situation.<sup>18</sup> According to the historian Giuseppe Casarrubea, Andreotti was actually the 'personal secretary' of Morlion before entering in Prime Minister De Gasperi's entourage.<sup>19</sup> Once nominated undersecretary, he became the political referent point of Morlion.

Andreotti and Rossellini met several times after their first encounter in a liberated Rome in 1944. As Andreotti himself revealed in an interview issued at the end of the 1980s, he viewed Rossellini as the only Italian film director who could be considered a Christian Democrat.<sup>20</sup> Andreotti had always considered Rossellini a political party friend, and there are two documents that prove this. The first one is a note, written by the undersecretary on July 23, 1952. A few days before, in a long detailed letter sent to Rossellini, Andreotti criticized strongly on political grounds the film *Europa '51* (*Europe '51*, 1952), finished but not yet released. When they subsequently met, Rossellini presented himself to Andreotti as a Christian Democrat. This is revealed in a memo: "Met Rossellini. He wanted and wants to make a film as a man belonging to the Christian Democratic party."<sup>21</sup> The second proof can be read in Andreotti's diary. On March 3, 1953, he wrote that "Rossellini insist(ed) on having the Christian Democratic party's membership card back," and that Rossellini "used to come to the meetings at Piazza del Gesù."<sup>22</sup> If Rossellini 'insisted' on having his membership card back, he must have possessed one in the post-war period, when he attended the meeting at Piazza del Gesù, where the Christian Democratic party had its headquarters. Likewise, it is conceivable that he chose to distance himself from any militant action that might damage his relationship with the Communist Party, which he considered equally important in the immediate post-war period. After the Christian Democratic Party's election victory in 1948, Rossellini dropped any links with the Communist Left and tried to jump on the bandwagon. This attempt, however, faced some resistance from within

the Christian Democratic Party, possibly instigated by De Gasperi himself, who didn't want to compromise his reputation by associating with such a scandalous film director.<sup>23</sup> In any case, Rossellini could always count on his friend Andreotti's support.

Morlion and Rossellini met in June 1947 in Brussels during the *Festival Mondial du Film et des Beaux-Arts*, where Italian neorealism was enjoying great success, thanks to *Paisan* (directed by Rossellini, 1946).<sup>24</sup> Between 1948 and 1952 Morlion collaborated as scriptwriter in three of Rossellini's films: *Stromboli*, *Flowers of St. Francis* and *Europe '51*. During this period Morlion was one of the leading figures in the Catholic film action. Later on, a conflict with *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico* (Catholic Cinematographic Center, from now on CCC) would cause increasing isolation for the Dominican. A decade after the war, the Catholic Church's approach to affirm its power in modern society had changed. Instead of gaining new influential positions, Catholics now wanted to defend their territory, and a personality like Morlion seemed too audacious. It is also possible, however, that among the reasons that led the hierarchy to separate Morlion from the world of movies was also his collaboration with Rossellini, who was regarded with suspicion by both the conservative wing (as we will see later) and the left wing of the Catholic Church.<sup>25</sup>

Rondi and Rossellini met in October 1948 in Paris. The film critic recounted the history (from which he had always pragmatically deleted the name of Andreotti) of his relationship with Rossellini on several occasions: he enthusiastically participated, alongside Morlion, in the making of *Stromboli* and *Flowers of St. Francis*, and then supported them with his reviews and his vote as a member of the jury in the eleventh Venice Film Festival. Nevertheless, Rossellini, who expected to win the festival, laid the blame on Rondi when he didn't obtain any awards, and from that moment, their friendship was no longer the same.<sup>26</sup>

Andreotti and Rondi met for the first time in 1947 on the occasion of *Cinecittà's* re-opening, attended by the former in his capacity as under-secretary and by the latter as a reporter.<sup>27</sup> Willing to gradually expand his control over the Venice Film Festival in 1949, Andreotti appointed Rondi a member of the jury along with Morlion, who had had a seat in the jury the year before.<sup>28</sup> In 1955, Andreotti would also hire Rondi on the editorial staff of *Concretezza*, the magazine of his political group, founded after De Gasperi's death. Rondi would pay him back with absolute fidelity, reaffirmed in a recent book-length interview, which is dedicated to "the life of Senator Giulio Andreotti, to whom I am bound by years of deep, devout respect."<sup>29</sup>

In any case, Andreotti, Morlion and Rondi had many opportunities to meet at the Pro Deo, where Rondi had been teaching film analysis since 1948 at the Film Department of the Faculty of Journalism (*Facoltà di Giornalismo*). An International Institute of Cinema was active within the same faculty, with the concrete aim of producing Catholic neorealist films. In a

memorandum sent to Suárez shortly before the eleventh Venice Film Festival, Morlion claimed: "The Institute of Cinema has gained extraordinary fame for the original creative effort made in joining the true realist philosophy and the Italian neorealist films movement."<sup>30</sup> In the same memorandum, Morlion indicated *Stromboli* and *Flowers of St. Francis* as the two most important films made with the support of his institute and said that he had appointed Rondi as head of the institute.<sup>31</sup>

In 1950, Morlion and Rondi went to Venice (the former incognito;<sup>32</sup> the latter as a member of the jury) with the hope of being rewarded for their 'creative effort,' but alas, the 'extraordinary fame' of their institute, as extolled by Morlion, proved insufficient to realize their aspired recognition. The eleventh Venice Film Festival, which should have relaunched Rossellini's career with the presentation of *Stromboli* and *Flowers of St. Francis*, became one of his most unexpected setbacks.

### THE REASONS FOR FAILURE

Even though Andreotti was appointed undersecretary in June 1947, he really only became operative in the field of cinema after April 1948, when strengthened by the extraordinary electoral achievement. After gaining control over the Ufficio centrale per la cinematografia (Cinematographic Central Office), which had the task of subsidizing national cinema and administer censorship, Andreotti started a resolute action with the aim of "giving Italian cinema a concrete opportunity to develop itself." Of course, this had to be done "according to the direction he wanted [. . .] and without irritating the Americans."<sup>33</sup> While attracting international attention, Italian cinema was actually moving in the direction of neorealism, a trend greatly disliked not only by the government, but also by the Church, whose interests within the government were represented by Andreotti.

One can get a clear idea of how troubled the relationship between the Church and neorealism was by examining some post-war issues of the CCC's film magazine *Rivista del Cinematografo*, which during an entire decade blamed Italian cinema for treating in a realistic way two prohibited subjects: sex and politics. A realistic aesthetic, which assumed the representation of evil as part of reality, was considered by the Catholic culture morally deviant. An article published in the *Rivista del Cinematografo*'s September 1947 issue stated forcefully that a place like a movie theater is unsuitable for coming into contact with life's negativity. It also claimed that to know life's negativity, "church-goers must rely on the direction of the Church itself which has experienced what evil is, on behalf of everyone, for centuries."<sup>34</sup>

Beside moral considerations, there were political ones. For the Catholic culture, a film that put emphasis on social conflict was dangerous for the cohesion of society. In 1952, Andreotti intended to defend Italy against

neorealism when he scolded Vittorio De Sica for "having served badly his homeland," leading the world to believe that the Italy represented in *Umberto D.* (1952) was real.<sup>35</sup> In doing so, he translated into political terms thoughts widely circulated within the Catholic context during the previous years.

In order to contrast neorealism, Andreotti and Morlion tried to encourage alternative models. Instead of attacking neorealism directly, they pressured his founder, Roberto Rossellini, by inviting him to develop a new one. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that the choice of Rossellini was not a happy one, but there were probably not many alternatives.

During the same period, Morlion was also involved in the project of adapting for film Giovannino Guareschi's *Mondo piccolo*.<sup>36</sup> The story, which Morlion developed in hope of being assigned to write the script, is introduced by the following note: "The film-director must possess a special Christian dynamism. [. . .] Blasetti seems to be appropriate."<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, Blasetti stated he was not available, as did De Sica, Renato Castellani and Mario Camerini. The reason why they all refused is explained by De Sica's answer in which he affirmed: "I have been accused several times of being a communist. To prove that I am not a communist, I do not need to do any evidently anti-communist film."<sup>38</sup> Given that no one in Italy wanted to clash against the PCI, they had to search beyond Italy to find someone to direct *Don Camillo* (*The Little World of Don Camillo*, 1952), the most successful Italian film of the 1950s. Indeed, the film finally was assigned to the French director Julien Duvivier who asked to work with his trusted script-writer René Barjavel, which frustrated Morlion's desire to be involved in the project.

Personally, Rossellini was going through a time of great difficulty. In August 1948, the ninth Venice Film Festival had turned out to be a disaster for him. On that occasion, Morlion, who was among the jurors who voted against Rossellini's anthology film *L'amore* (*Love*, 1948) because of its blasphemous episode *Il miracolo* (*The Miracle*), offered to help him reform neorealism to make it more acceptable to Catholic sensibilities. It is likely that Rossellini did not take too seriously the Dominican's offer at that time. However, between December 1948 and January 1949, *Love* and *Germania anno zero* (*Germany Year Zero*, 1948) were banned from Italian parish cinemas (a typology of cinema that was rapidly expanding thanks to the strong support of Andreotti's policies). This fact, in addition to the institutional changes brought about by the Christian Democratic Party's electoral victory, provided Morlion with more power than he had had a few months before. It was then, and only then, that the story of *Stromboli*, which Rossellini had already written from an entirely secular perspective, could be tinged with religious tones and the title of the Italian version changed to *Terra di Dio* (*Land of God*). This project was followed by *Flowers of St. Francis*, designed specifically for the Jubilee of 1950.



The birth of Catholic neorealism should have been announced at the eleventh Venice Film Festival, where Rossellini participated with these two religious films—one in the competition, the other out of the competition—that were made, thanks to Morlion's advice and by taking advantage of Andreotti's institutional support. However, something went wrong because of several unpredictable factors. First of all, an argument between Rossellini and RKO meant that *Stromboli*, which was initially part of the competition program, was replaced with *Flowers of St. Francis*, which was not initially included in the competition program. *Flowers of St. Francis* would not be as esteemed by the president of the jury, Mario Gromo, as *Stromboli*. Gromo (as two other members of the jury, Antonio Baldini and Piero Gadda Conti, actually did) would have confirmed for Rossellini the appreciation given a few months earlier during *Premio Roma*, an important Christian Democratic manifestation where Rossellini's *Stromboli* triumphed.<sup>39</sup>

Second, and not realizing what really was at stake, Pope Pius XII denied Morlion permission to return to take part in the jury, even after repeated requests from both the Dominican himself and Andreotti. The Pope never recovered from the shock of seeing the picture of Morlion in front of Magnani's plunging neckline published in the newspaper *La Stampa* during the ninth Venice Film Festival and decided that a film festival wasn't the best place for a religious man.

Finally, unable to arrive on time at the Lido for some unknown reasons, Diego Fabbri, one of Rossellini's collaborators in the writing of *Flowers of St. Francis*, had to be replaced in the jury at the last minute, and Andreotti made the mistake of giving his seat to Turi Vasile, not knowing he was strongly adverse to Rossellini.

Given the support inside the jury, of Gromo, Morlion and Fabbri (in addition to Rondi, Baldini and Gadda Conti), Rossellini could have won the 'Leone di San Marco,' which in Andreotti and Morlion's view, would have increased the credibility of the new deal of Rossellini's cinema.<sup>40</sup> However, by winning the festival, they probably couldn't have achieved any more than delaying the death of this Catholic neorealism, which would soon reveal all its inner contradictions.<sup>41</sup>

The first contradiction was assigning the task of Christianizing Italian cinema to a nonbelieving director who was widely known for his questionable moral behavior, which was not congruent with Catholic teaching. The way in which the hierarchy considered Rossellini is explained in the correspondence between the Prefect of the Congregation of the Holy Office, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, and the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, in October 1960:

From the bulletin of the information agency Assi, which I enclose, it appears that a Catholic organisation from there had decided to award a prize to the too known film director Rossellini for the film *Era notte a Roma* (*Blackout in Rome*, 1960). Your Eminence can surely see the

serious impropriety of such assignment, which would appear as an approval by Catholics of attitudes of thought and customs opposed to those of the Church. I therefore promptly ask you to inform this Supreme Sacred Congregation if what is reported in the bulletin in question corresponds to the truth.<sup>42</sup>

The Catholic organization that had the unfortunate idea of assigning an award to “the too known” film director was the Jesuits’ *Centro San Fedele*, which only a few months before was under investigation by the Holy Office, with serious disciplinary consequences for having supported Federico Fellini’s *La dolce vita* (1960).<sup>43</sup> Montini immediately entrusted Monsignor Luigi Oldani with the task of investigating the matter, and within a few days, he learned that:

Father Bassan S.J. dismissed the possibility of giving a prize to Rossellini, also because it is not possible to separate a Rossellini’s film from his person. This year the S. Fedele Award will either not be given or attributed to Olmi’s *Il tempo si è fermato* (*Time Stood Still*, 1959). Please note that: rumor (Father Bruno) has it that at first they had thought about Rossellini, but then they felt the discomfort and the disadvantage of this option.<sup>44</sup>

This correspondence between two of the most powerful cardinals of the Italian Church at that time leaves no room for interpretation: it must be considered an authoritative and incontrovertible documentary evidence of the Church’s stance against the person of Rossellini and his work. If in 1960, rewarding Rossellini was felt even by the open-minded fathers of San Fedele a reason for “discomfort and disadvantage,” imagine how he would have appeared in the early 1950s, in the middle of the scandal caused by divorces and illegitimate pregnancies.

The most pertinent contradiction, however, was entrusting the task of producing undeniably Catholic films to a director whose style was characterized by a significant degree of ambiguity. Each text demands the cooperation of the reader, who must complete the meanings that the text leaves open. In the interpretative semiotic of Umberto Eco, the text is the product of a tension between the spoken and the unspoken, between what is explicit and what is only assumed, that the reader must be able to grasp. However, if the text is a “lazy machine,” full of gaps, empty spaces, waiting for the reader to fill them with meaning, then not all texts are lazy to the same degree.<sup>45</sup> Some of Rossellini’s films are so lazy that they appear negligent: their gaps are actually chasms where the critics and the audience risk falling into and producing conflicting interpretations.

It is precisely for this reason that Rossellini’s cinema seemed attractive to Andreotti and Morlion: it was open to several interpretations and ideological usages, and it gave the impression of being malleable for their specific

aims. Nonetheless, for the same reason, the decision to entrust Rossellini with the task of founding a Catholic neorealism would soon prove to be a mistake. Rossellini's preference for ambiguous sketches that require an audience-interpretative cooperation, rather than for finished works, was not suited to the purposes of propaganda. Instead of imposing a specific message on the viewer, his style opened the text to the unpredictable contribution of the varied cultures that came his way.

Rondi's partisan reviews were not sufficient to assure a uniform Catholic interpretation of *Stromboli* and *Flowers of St. Francis*. As a whole, Rossellini's religious cinema was the subject of much debate in its reception, and the different reactions to it are precisely due to the fact that the same text allows itself to be read by different (and in some cases opposite) points of view. An example of this is how the fifth episode of *Paisan* is stigmatized in the United States by the liberal Rudolf Arnheim for exalting a group of intolerant monks.<sup>46</sup> On the contrary, a review published by the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* complains about seeing in the film that "religious tolerance, which belonged to the mentality and propaganda overseas."<sup>47</sup> Analogous contrasted interpretations were given regarding *Stromboli*, *Flowers of St. Francis* and, in an even more conspicuous way, *The Miracle* which, on the occasion of its international release in 1952, became the reason for such controversy that it led the Supreme Court of the United States to extend to the movies the privileges of the Constitution's First Amendment.

During the Cold War period, Italy was the scene of a political and ideological battle aimed at capturing masses' consensus. The left-wing forces lost this battle first of all because they underestimated "the problem of communication, of the search for an appropriate language that would allow a real and fruitful exchange between intellectuals and workers."<sup>48</sup> They didn't understand the role of new languages and media (and especially that of cinema) in forming consensus and shaping society. "In political terms this was highly significant," Gundle pointed out and he continued "that a space was left free for other forces, principally the Catholics," who moved into the field of cinema with extraordinary foresight.<sup>49</sup> However, not all projects developed by Catholics were winning. One of the most ambitious, which is that of reforming neorealism by means of Rossellini, failed spectacularly.

## NOTES

1. For a more in-depth examination, see Subini, Tomaso. 2011/2013. *La doppia vita di "Francesco giullare di Dio."* Giulio Andreotti, Félix Morlion e Roberto Rossellini. Milan: Libraccio.
2. Treveri Gennari, Daniela. 2009. *Post-War Italian Cinema. American Intervention, Vatican Interests*. New York: Routledge, 37.
3. "Alcuni compiti di carattere sociale e religioso." See Luigi Sturzo, letter to Earl Brennan, May 4, 1944, in Tranfaglia, Nicola. 2004. *Come nasce la repubblica*.

- La mafia, il Vaticano e il neofascismo nei documenti americani e italiani 1943–1947*. Milan: Bompiani, 229. Translated by the author.
4. “Il punto di riferimento per la nascente collaborazione ideologica contro l’influenza del comunismo in Italia tra il Vaticano e le dirommazioni del governo Americano.” Di Nolfo, Ennio. 1989. “La storia del dopoguerra italiano e il cinema neorealista: intersezioni,” in *Il neorealismo tra cinema e storia, tra cultura e politica*, cyclostyled proceedings of a convention held in Turin, November 16–17, 1989: 20. Translated by the author.
  5. Gundle, Stephen. 2000. *Between Hollywood and Moscow*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 23.
  6. “La grande affermazione delle forze social-comuniste nelle elezioni del 7 giugno.” Translated by the author. In Archivio Generale della Curia Generalizia OP, Convento Santa Sabina, Rome: XIV.951 PRO.5.
  7. “L’apparato comunista si orienta verso un’azione rivoluzionaria.” Translated by the author. In Archivio Generale della Curia Generalizia OP, Convento Santa Sabina, Rome: XIV.951 PRO.5.
  8. “Piano di infiltrazione nei ceti comunisti.” Translated by the author. In Archivio Generale della Curia Generalizia OP, Convento Santa Sabina, Rome: XIV.951 PRO.5.
  9. Translated by the author. In Archivio Generale della Curia Generalizia OP, Convento Santa Sabina, Rome: XIV.951 PRO.5.
  10. “Giovani sacerdoti sociali.” “Per preparare l’infiltrazione nelle famiglie, prendere contatti con comunisti esitanti, formare altri sacerdoti per lo stesso lavoro.” Translated by the author. In Archivio Generale della Curia Generalizia OP, Convento Santa Sabina, Rome: XIV.951 PRO.5.
  11. On *cinforums*, see Dagrada, Elena and Subini, Tomaso. 2006. “Félix Morlion e Roberto Rossellini,” in Eugeni, Ruggero and Viganò, Dario, eds. *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*. Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 263–271.
  12. On the case of the *cinforums* in Milan, see Mosconi, Elena. 1994. “Cinema da vedere cinema da discutere. Quarant’anni di cinforum nelle sale milanesi,” in Dario Viganò, ed. *Cinema e Chiesa. Una storia che dura cent’anni*. Milan: Centro Ambrosiano, 49–72.
  13. Translated by the author. In Archivio Generale della Curia Generalizia OP, Convento Santa Sabina, Rome: XIV.951 PRO.5.
  14. Translated by the author. Morlion, Félix. (undated). *Conclusioni su un’azione decisiva per ridurre l’influenza comunista in Italia*, in Archivio della Provincia Romana di S. Caterina da Siena OP, Basilica di Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Rome: PR.B.II.8.14.
  15. Félix Morlion, letter to Manuel Suárez, January 17, 1949, in Archivio Generale della Curia Generalizia OP, Convento Santa Sabina, Rome: XIV.951 PRO.5.
  16. Andreotti, Giulio. 2005. 1947. *L’anno delle grandi svolte nel diario di un protagonista*. Milan: Rizzoli; Andreotti, Giulio. 2005. 1948. *L’anno dello scampato pericolo*, Milan: Rizzoli; Andreotti, Giulio. 2006. 1949. *L’anno del Patto Atlantico*, Milan: Rizzoli.
  17. Translated by the author. In Andreotti, 2006, 168.
  18. See Andreotti, Giulio. 1988. *L’Urss vista da vicino*. Milan: Rizzoli, 308.
  19. “Segretario particolare.” Translated by the author. Casarrubea, Giuseppe in Tranfaglia, 2004. *Come nasce la repubblica*, 228.
  20. Andreotti in Farassino, Alberto. 1989. “Intervista all’ex sottosegretario Giulio Andreotti,” in Alberto Farassino, ed. *Neorealismo. Cinema italiano 1945–1949*. Turin: EDT, 77.
  21. “Vedo Ross. Ha voluto e vuole fare un film da uomo di partito democristiano.” Translated by the author. See Giulio Andreotti, autographic note, July

- 23, 1952, in Archivio Giulio Andreotti at Archivio Storico dell'Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Rome: file Roberto Rossellini, folder 1532.
22. Translated by the author. In Andreotti, Giulio. 2007. *1953. Fu legge truffa?* Milan: Rizzoli, 41.
23. See Subini, *La doppia vita di "Francesco giullare di Dio,"* 64.
24. See Brady, Anna Mary. 1950. "Come si sgonfia una grossa montatura giornalistica," *L'ora dell'azione*, February 25.
25. As explained by the numerous attacks on Rossellini's religious cinema from some leading figures of the left wing of the Italian Catholic movements. See Subini, *La doppia vita di "Francesco giullare di Dio,"* 61, 76–81.
26. See Rondi, Gian Luigi. 2003. "Rossellini e la Bergman. 'Una' verità dopo 50 anni," *Nuova Antologia*, a. 138, fasc. 2226, April–June: 328.
27. See Franco, Massimo. 2008. *Andreotti. La vita di un uomo politico, la storia di un'epoca*. Milan: Mondadori, 45.
28. As we will see later, in the 1949 edition of the festival, Pius XII forced Morlion to resign at the last moment. In the 1950 edition, the pope responded to the renewed request of Morlion (and Andreotti), denying permission again. On these documents, see Subini, *La doppia vita di "Francesco giullare di Dio,"* 176–183.
29. "Al Senatore a vita Giulio Andreotti, cui mi legano anni di profondo, devoto rispetto." Translated by the author. In Casavecchia, Simone. 2008. *Rondi visto da vicino*. Cantalupo in Sabina: Edizioni Sabinæ, 95.
30. "L'Istituto di Cinematografia si è acquistato una fama eccezionalmente viva [. . .] in seguito all'originalità dello sforzo creativo di unire la vera filosofia realista al movimento italiano del film neorealista." Translated by the author. Morlion, Félix. (1950). *Rapporto n. 1. I compiti specifici degli organismi Pro Deo e i primi risultati raggiunti*, August 1950, in Archivio Generale della Curia Generalizia OP, Convento Santa Sabina, Rome: XIV.951 PRO.5. The true realist philosophy is, for Morlion, the Thomistic Doctrine.
31. Morlion, Félix. 1950. *Rapporto n. 2. Forma organizzativa dell'Unione Pro Deo Italia e dirigenti responsabili*, August 1950, in Archivio Generale della Curia Generalizia OP, Convento Santa Sabina, Rome: XIV.951 PRO.5. That year, Rondi also became president of the *Cineforum Nazionale*, the association that organized the numerous film clubs founded by Morlion. Casavecchia, *Rondi visto da vicino*, 98.
32. Subini, *La doppia vita di "Francesco giullare di Dio,"* 184.
33. Translated by the author. In Quaglietti, Lorenzo. 1980. *Storia economico-politica del cinema italiano 1945–1980*. Rome: Editori Riuniti, 60.
34. Translated by the author. In Di Graziano, Renzo. 1947. "Campane sul cinema," *Rivista del Cinematografo*, a. XX, n. 9, September: 8.
35. Translated by the author. In Andreotti, Giulio. 1952. "Piaghe sociali e necessità di redenzione," *Libertas*, n. 7, 28 February: 5.
36. See Guareschi, Giovannino. 1948. *Mondo piccolo. Don Camillo*. Milan: Rizzoli. English translation: *The Little World of Don Camillo*. 1950. New York: Grosset and Dunlap.
37. Translated by the author. In Morlion, Félix. 1950. *Note per una eventuale elaborazione di un soggetto cinematografico tratto dal volume "Don Camillo" di G. Guareschi*, October 17, 1950, in Archivio Giovannino Guareschi, Roncole Verdi (Parma), file 1.2.6.6.
38. "Sono stato più volte accusato di essere comunista. Non ho bisogno per dimostrare che non sono comunista, di fare un film dichiaratamente anticomunista." Translated by the author. De Sica, in De Santi, Giuseppe. 2003. *Vittorio De Sica*. Milan: Il Castoro, 81.

39. Subini, *La doppia vita di "Francesco giullare di Dio,"* 170–171.
40. On the jury's works at the eleventh Venice Film Festival, see Subini. 2011. *La doppia vita di "Francesco giullare di Dio":* 187–189.
41. The comedy version of Catholic neorealism represented by the saga of Don Camillo had better fortune. While *The Flowers of St. Francis* collected little more than 20 million lire and had a bad critical reception, *Don Camillo* by Duvivier earned 1.4 billion lire and received good reviews (above all from Catholic critics).
42. Translated by the author. Alfredo Ottaviani, letter to Giovanni Battista Montini, October 19, 1960, in Archivio Storico Diocesano, Milan, Fondo Montini, envelope Enti, folder 108, file 126.
43. On *La dolce vita*'s Catholic reception, see Subini, Tomaso. 2006. "Il caso de 'La dolce vita,'" in *Attraverso lo schermo*, 239–255, and Subini, Tomaso. 2010. "L'arcivescovo di Milano e 'La dolce vita,'" *Bianco e Nero*, a. LXXI, n. 567, May–August, 33–43.
44. Translated by the author. Luigi Oldani, letter to Giovanni Battista Montini, October 24, 1960, in Archivio Storico Diocesano, Fondo Montini, envelope Enti, folder 108, file 126.
45. Eco, Umberto. 1979. *Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi*, Milan: Bompiani, 24. The concept of text as a lazy machine is proposed again in Eco, Umberto. 1994. *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 3. "Every text, after all (as I have already written), is a lazy machine asking the reader to do some of its work. What a problem it would be if a text were to say everything the receiver is to understand—it would never end."
46. Arnheim, Rudolf. 1948. "Lettera dagli Stati Uniti," *Bianco e Nero*, a. IX, n. 4, June: 44.
47. Translated by the author. In Meneghini, Mario. 1947. "Prime visioni," *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 12.
48. Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*, 40.
49. Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*, 41.

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## **Part IV**

# **Censorship and Control**



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# 11 Protectionism and Catholic Film Policy in Twentieth-Century Ireland

*Kevin Rockett*<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The reception and circulation of films in Ireland throughout the twentieth century were inextricably linked to the policies of the Catholic Church. Well before cinema began in the 1890s, theological orthodoxies and activist policies had been cast in certainties that would collide with the fluid desires inherent in the cinematic image and narrative. What Annabelle could offer through glimpses beneath her fluttering skirts in Thomas Edison's *Annabelle Serpentine Dance* (Dickson and Heise, 1894) and other such films was an erotic attraction that had to be contained, the Church argued, if not suppressed altogether. When cinema moved decisively after the mid-1900s from the recording of real events towards narratively integrated films, the opportunities for representing transgressive events increased exponentially. From an Irish Catholic perspective, nothing was more transgressive than representations which depicted an unstable or broken family, and cinema was to produce countless films featuring extramarital affairs that often led to divorce, something anathema to Catholic ideology. From the Catholic perspective, the preferred cinematic option was severe punishment, rather than celebration, of the nontraditional woman, something which American film censors imposed after 1934. More parochially, to the forefront of Irish Catholic policy was the view that people had to be protected from the cinema in general, though in later decades, it sought to develop what it regarded as a more constructive film policy.

## FRAMING CATHOLIC FILM POLICIES

Twentieth-century Irish Catholicism had at its core the policy of ultramontan-ism, or a commitment to centralized papal authority, while the theological and moral influences were more varied, if no less strict. One important influence was Augustinianism, derived from the fourth/fifth-century writings of Augustine of Hippo, who proclaimed the essential sinfulness of people and the innate corruption of human nature, while Jansenism, after

the seventeenth-century Dutch theologian Cornelius Jansen, a strict disciplinarian in the tradition of Augustine, foregrounded the importance of God's grace in the belief that it was gifted to an elect few and without which salvation could not be achieved. Following the French Revolution and an influx to Ireland of expelled clergy, Jansenism gained influence at the Catholic seminary at Maynooth, the pontifical university town in county Kildare, near Dublin. A third strand, related to Jansenism, is the overly legalistic philosophy of rigorism, a moral system in which rigorous surveillance of people's liberty was required in order to ensure compliance with God's will. In their imposition on the Irish Catholic people of these strains of institutional organization, and theological and moral conservatism, the country's bishops regarded themselves as above challenge, including from democratic forces; indeed, they saw themselves as the agents of God's grace.

Another theological influence needs to be highlighted, as it had, perhaps, a more direct impact on secular society. Thomism, or the theology articulated by Saint Thomas Aquinas, promoted a balance between Christianity and Aristotelianism, or between faith and reason. The neo-Thomist revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially as promoted by Pope Leo XIII (pope from 1878 to 1903) in effect made Aquinas the Catholic Church's official theologian. In this vein, Leo XIII's successor, Pius X (1903–1914), also articulated an anti-rationalist hostility to modernity which had at its center a rejection of the Enlightenment, individualism and, of course, featured an in-built hostility to Protestantism, while its misogyny was barely disguised. In Ireland, several influential figures concerned with film policy were heavily influenced by Thomism, including Monsignor Michael Cronin, a member of the Censorship of Films Appeal Board in the 1920s and 1930s; Father Richard Devane, SJ, a film activist from the 1920s through to his death in 1951 and especially Doctor John Charles McQuaid, who played a critical role in Irish film policy during his tenure as Archbishop of Dublin (1940–1971). Many of these sought a return to what they called the 'organic' Christian Church of the pre-Reformation period,<sup>2</sup> in a manner not dissimilar to how Irish nationalists longed for a Gaelic-speaking Ireland as it existed prior to the Cambro-Norman invasion of the country in the late twelfth century.

The Church's nostalgia for a feudal era, and its rejection of institutional and intellectual currents since the Reformation, necessarily cast doubt on the post-independence Irish state with its 'hybrid democracy' of English and French secular influences in the spirit of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Thus, while the achievement of Irish independence from the despised English Protestant state ought to have been seen as a triumph, since the alien religion was displaced in a state that was now 95 percent Catholic, the Church still felt it had to fight to try to impose its will on sometimes reluctant politicians, not all of whom, of course, were Catholics. As a result, the new Irish state did not prove to be as deferential to the Catholic hierarchy as might have been expected, or as is sometimes popularly imagined.



Figure 11.1 John Charles McQuaid.

Nevertheless, many secular leaders shared its perspectives, if not the extremity of the clerical positions.

Central to the approach by Catholic intellectuals was the notion of ‘Catholic protectionism’ from ‘alien’ influences. One such advocate, Father Edward Cahill, SJ, a professor of church history and a lecturer in sociology, not only promoted the idea that a conspiracy of Freemasons and Jews existed against the Catholic Church, but he regarded film and popular culture in a similar light. Indeed, in a pamphlet, *Ireland’s peril* (1927), Cahill, in an echo of Father Devane’s complaints against the cinema, blamed cinema for weaning spectators away from “the old Christian outlook and tradition.”<sup>3</sup> How these ideas were popularized by bishops had an important bearing on public discourse.

While papal Encyclicals were addressed to the ‘universal’ Church, bishops could articulate more parochial concerns through annual Pastoral Letters issued during Lent. These rather severe good-conduct guides, often colored by bombastic rhetoric and threats of damnation, were, in accordance with the hierarchy’s rigorist morality and pre-Reformation view of its members, expected to be obeyed absolutely. In 1924, “chief among” the abuses attacked by the bishops in their Pastoral Letters were “women’s immodest fashions in dress, indecent dances, unwholesome theatrical performances and cinema exhibitions, evil literature and drink, strikes and lock-outs.”<sup>4</sup>

While such views were not unknown in the pre-independence period, in the wake of the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 and the subsequent civil war (1922–1924) over the terms of the settlement with England (partition of the island was imposed by English negotiators), the Catholic Church sought to assert control of its community through a focus on a new external enemy, the ‘immorality’ of imported pastimes—dancing, reading and the cinema in particular. As Bishop James McNamee put it in 1927:

The danger to our national characteristics was greater than ever. The foreign Press was more widely diffused amongst us; the cinema brought very vivid representations of foreign manners and customs; and the radio would bring foreign music and the propagation of foreign ideals. Those new inventions had their uses, but they had also their disadvantages, being new and powerful agencies of anti-nationalism and perhaps of denationalisation.<sup>5</sup>

What was promoted instead of imported popular culture was the ‘Gaelic movement,’ the attempt to re-establish Irish as the vernacular, as well as vigorous cross-generational Irish dancing which would more likely lead to exhaustion than to sexual intimacy and erotic display between dancing partners.

Of course, the population was not likely to give up voluntarily the attractive pleasures of imported popular culture. Indeed, a joint Pastoral Letter from the hierarchy in 1927 forlornly commented that

the evil one is ever setting its snares for unwary feet. At the moment, his traps for the innocent are chiefly the dance hall, the bad book, the indecent paper, the motion picture and the immodest fashion in female dress—all of which tend to destroy the virtues characteristic of our race.<sup>6</sup>

This anti-modernist rhetoric was to remain a feature of Irish Catholic discourse throughout the 1930s, with the attractions seen on the cinema screen blamed even for the migration of young people to England and the United States. It should be noted, though, that such concerns about popular culture were not confined to Ireland. In 1923, for example, a thirty-five-nation conference was held in Geneva on the international distribution of ‘obscene’ literature, and there were national restrictions in a great many

countries of dances, literature and the cinema. Ireland, though, was seen as particularly vulnerable in that it was an English-speaking country heavily engaged with England and the United States, and thus without the language barrier available in other European countries, especially after the coming of sound cinema; and, of course, most matters of secular and religious policy remained locked in a sterile dichotomous relationship with the former colonial power.

In line with the 'rigorous' intellectual sensibilities of key religious figures, it is unsurprising that statutory restrictions should be sought on imported popular culture. In this way, cinema came first in the firing line as an inter-denominational group, led, it must be said, by Catholic activists, pressurized a compliant government into introducing the Censorship of Films Act in 1923. Its provision for the censorship of all films prior to their public exhibition was designed to ensure that films deemed indecent, obscene or blasphemous, or were likely to be contrary to public morality, were to be denied a censor's certification for release. As the impulse behind the censors' approach was that the family was the unit of the state, any film that infringed this perspective was either banned or cut. Thus, films that featured extra-marital affairs, adultery, divorce, homosexuality, abortion or even nontraditional activities by women such as smoking or drinking alcohol were put under the censors' rigorous scrutiny. Even though an appeals board existed, it was dominated by senior Catholic and Protestant theologians, such as the aforementioned Monsignor Cronin and the Protestant professor of moral theology at Trinity College Dublin. As a result, during its first forty years in operation, when the censors only issued general, or universal, certificates, about 2,500 films were banned and another 10,000–12,000 were cut.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, while a figure such as Father Richard Devane could praise the operation of film censorship, in line with many others, he called for more rigorous controls on children's attendance at cinemas. Unlike the film censors, though, Devane favored age classification of films similar to that operating in Britain and elsewhere, something which was allowed for in the 1923 film censorship act. It is one of the anomalies of Irish film censorship policy that the censors' masters, civil servants and politicians in the Department of Justice, consistently opposed such age classification on the grounds that it would encourage 'unhealthy curiosity' in age-restricted films. As a result, all but a handful of films released in Ireland before the policy was changed in 1965 were classified for all age groups, thus suppressing not just post-war adult cinema for Irish audiences, but allowing cut versions of adult films to be seen by young children.

While film censorship set the protectionist agenda with restrictions on literature (Censorship of Publications Act, 1929) and dances (Public Dance Halls Act, 1935) to follow, thus enshrining in law key policy objectives of the Catholic activists, we are turning our attention to what can be characterized as 'positive' Catholic policies towards the cinema. The key figure in this regard during the 1930s and 1940s was Father Richard Devane.

## A VOCATIONALIST OR A SECTARIAN FILM INSTITUTE?

Devane had been a campaigner against 'evil literature' in the 1910s and 1920s, and played a key role in helping establish publications censorship and dance hall supervision. Nevertheless, he was the single most influential figure, clerical or lay, to campaign for a broad-based film institute in the 1930s, and he sought to align such a positive view of film in the national interest with restrictions on imported media. He was seen by the hierarchy and secular newspapers alike as an articulate and well-informed commentator who proposed practical remedies to society's problems.

Three different documents influenced Devane's thinking on the cinema: *The Film in National Life* (1932) was a comprehensive look at all aspects of film in Britain and soon led to the establishment of the state-funded but relatively independent British Film Institute; the 1931 papal Encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, which, published at the height of the worldwide economic depression, emphasized for Devane the importance of vocationalism; and the first papal Encyclical on the cinema, *Vigilanti cura* (1936), which provided a Catholic moral context for film.

By the time *Vigilanti cura* was published, Devane had dramatically, and positively, intervened, even hijacked, a public controversy in 1935 between the government-supporting and strongly nationalist daily newspaper *The Irish Press* and major film distributors and exhibitors. The newspaper's campaign against the cinema had been prompted by a judge's comments that the increase in crime was "largely due to the pictures," and led the *Press* to state in an editorial that the effects of cinema were "bad" and its representations of "morality and truth were distorted."<sup>8</sup> When irate exhibitors in protest, perhaps foolishly, withdrew advertising from the *Press*, it paved the way for an outpouring of national (against Hollywood) and moral (asserting Catholic credentials) outrage against the cinema. While the *Irish Press'* campaign against the cinema had all the hallmarks of a manufactured controversy designed to put the former radical republicans in a more favorable light with conservative elements in society, nevertheless, it gave an opening to Devane to propose a more positive use of the cinema (and to get the *Press* off the hook in the process).<sup>9</sup>

Devane wrote to the *Press* to reposition the debate away from what was taking on a party political hue and attacked the negative tone of the exchanges, pointing to how little of a constructive character had been articulated in the exchanges. He cited the examples of Spain, Germany, Italy and the USSR as countries where cinema was being used in "a thoroughly organized manner, for national propagandist, educational and cultural purposes."<sup>10</sup> Of course, citing Fascist Europe (Portugal would soon be added to the list) and Stalinist Russia as models for Ireland was driven in part by a feature of their film output: how Socialist realism and Nazi cinema elevated the 'classical' sculpted and desexualized body through the promotion of athletics and other vigorous sports as the antidote to

Anglo-American cinema's celebration of erotic display. Thus, in Devane's mind, Fascism, Communism and Victorian repression had much in common in that they contained the sexualized body.

Within a couple of weeks of having his letter published, the well-connected Devane organized a major public meeting with a broad spectrum of civil and religious leaders. The national press unanimously endorsed Devane's proposal for a government commission of inquiry into the cinema in Ireland, the ultimate purpose of which would be the establishment of a film institute. Unsurprisingly, the (British) film trade press were not so generous in their appraisal of Devane's aims and adopted a sarcastic tone towards him, but *The Cinema*, while finding no difficulty with the establishment of a 'well-balanced' committee of inquiry, provided a shrewd and well-informed assessment of the government's response by correctly anticipating that the issue would be deferred.<sup>11</sup> The persistent Devane, who personally knew Prime Minister Eamon de Valera, gained his support for the inquiry, which was set up in 1938, but his key ministers in Justice, Education, Finance, and Industry and Commerce were opposed to it. The Second World War brought more pressing issues into focus, with the result that the inquiry petered out after four years, and the inquiry report was not even published. The inquiry committee of mid-ranking civil servants did not endorse the film institute proposal; it left film censorship intact; it expressed Ireland's impotence in trying to redress the imbalance of power between Hollywood distributors and indigenous Irish exhibitors, and suggested the setting up of a modest state-supported film studio, something which eventually happened in 1958. The one (important) crumb from a Catholic perspective was that the only immediate initiative that came out of the inquiry—an annual grant for the purchase of educational films to be made available by government—would directly benefit the Catholic activists' emerging plan for a film institute.

## A CATHOLIC FILM INSTITUTE

The notion of vocationalism, a term akin to Portuguese corporatism as articulated and administered by the Salazarian dictatorship, gained a considerable degree of support in Ireland following the publication of *Quadragesimo anno*. Essentially, vocationalism proposed that social organizations be inclusive of capital and labor in local and intermediate assemblies. When this policy was applied to the cinema, Devane proposed that an Irish film institute be established with representatives from such diverse bodies as the secular and interdenominational, art cinema-oriented Irish Film Society (established 1936), film exhibitors and distributors, theaters and sports bodies, as well as the churches. This vocationalist policy became attached to *Vigilanti cura* from 1936 and was received favorably by mainstream newspapers as well as by some political leaders.



By the early 1940s, though, a new dynamic had come into play. While Devane had received extensive support from the Catholic hierarchy for the film institute and the government inquiry into the cinema, with the appointment of the traditionalist or integralist John Charles McQuaid as the Archbishop of Dublin in 1940, any notion of an interdenominational film body came up against McQuaid's total opposition to allowing Catholics in the country's most important diocese participate in any body in which there were Protestant representatives. As a result, McQuaid set about dismantling interdenominational social and cultural organizations and opposed any proposals that were not under exclusive Catholic control. Thus, Devane's broad-based film institute proposal came up against McQuaid's determined opposition.

What is revealed in the McQuaid papers in the Dublin diocesan archive are the lengths to which he went to ensure that his policy was strictly observed and that those who even mildly criticized such an approach, including Devane and his supporters, were sidelined. McQuaid took a particularly hostile view of the Irish Film Society and squashed any attempts to allow them to participate in the new Catholic film body; indeed, such was the tension between the two organizations that in its early years, the Catholic film institute would not even supply information about its activities to the film society's publication. Thereafter, there appears to have been little contact between the two bodies.

The result was that when eventually the National Film Institute of Ireland (NFI) was incorporated in 1945, it took as its terms of reference the principles underpinning *Vigilanti cura*, and all of those not subscribing to such an ideology, such as the Irish Film Society, were excluded from the new body. Five years later, the NFI became a member of the International Catholic Cinema Office (OCIC) with the support of the Catholic bishops, by which time McQuaid himself was the NFI's sole patron, a position he retained until his death in 1973.

While clerical influence on the National Film Institute of Ireland board was quite visible in its early years and no important initiative was undertaken without ensuring McQuaid's acquiescence, nevertheless, the organization was overseen by a group of Catholic lay professionals: educators, solicitors, doctors and the like, some of whom were involved at the highest level in the Knights of St. Columbanus, an influential secretive group that acted as the eyes and ears for McQuaid not just throughout the Dublin archdiocese, but in the entire country. The Knights of Saint Columbanus were used by McQuaid on many issues to influence national policy, not least through his recommendations to the Department of Justice, with whose chief administrators he was in regular telephone contact, of appointees to the film and publications censorship boards.

Noting the lack of interest by commercial cinema distributors in stocking educational films, the NFI's first task was to build up such a library using the annual government grant which had been proposed in the 1938–1942

government inquiry and creating a market for these films through the educational system, in which it had a powerful role through its network of schools, and with clubs and societies. By the 1950s, it held almost 1000 16mm titles on subjects as various as progressive farming methods to travelogues donated by national embassies, thus filling a gap not catered to by commercial distributors. To deal with the lack of 16mm projectors in schools and elsewhere, the NFI sent traveling projectionists around the country who visited even the most remote rural areas. By 1960, the NFI had 2000 films in its catalog, rising to almost twice that number by the effective end of its activities with the advent of the domestic video recorder in the early 1980s.

Almost all of these films were produced outside Ireland, so one of the partnerships the NFI developed from its inception was with government as it began to occasionally commission information films on topics such as health, safety and savings, though the most interesting films made by the NFI in its early years were on the life of the Irish patriot Thomas Davis (*A Nation Once Again*, Stafford, 1946) and on the life of poet W.B. Yeats (*W.B. Yeats—A Tribute*, Fleischmann and Sheridan, 1950). It responded to government language policy by making dual versions—Irish and English—of many documentary and drama-documentary information films. The NFI also acted as distributor for other government-sponsored films and served as an intermediary between government and the film trade, notwithstanding the NFI's persistent criticism of film censorship.

It was a feature of the NFI's approach to cinema that it remained dissatisfied with the Official Film Censor, usually a devout Catholic who was a well-connected professional. Indeed, in the mid-1950s, the NFI established film reviewing panels whereby films issued with certificates by the Film Censor were reclassified according to Catholic moral prescription, and such lists with commentaries were issued to Catholic schools, as well as to the media, which tended to ignore them. As was the case with many Catholic activists, the NFI reviewers rarely praised a commercially released film, even if it was severely cut; only with the total suppression of cinema was it likely to be satisfied. The Department of Justice, which oversaw censorship regulation, was not going to adopt such a measure; indeed, at the end of the 1930s, its senior civil servants, expressing the views of their minister, had told Devane and other Catholic activists that the limits on freedom had been reached with the 1923 censorship act and its strict application.

Organizationally, the NFI sought to establish local 16mm film units, based on diocesan areas (that is, parishes), under the direction of the local bishop. However, as a reflection of the limitations of this policy, the NFI soon began to complain that 16mm equipment at the parish level was being used primarily for entertainment purposes and they wanted the bishops to instruct parish priests to restrict 16mm shows to educational films. This did not happen, but it is reflective of the NFI's attempt to inculcate Catholic Action throughout the society.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, the NFI's energies were

also expended in promoting film ‘appreciation’ along Catholic moral lines. Through summer schools, the film reviewing panels and their published film reviews of films on release, prestigious public lectures, a quarterly film journal from 1948 and engagement with the OCIC, it sought to raise awareness of the Catholic perspective on film. Indeed, in 1955, it hosted in Dublin the annual OCIC conference, the theme of which was “The extent and influence of the moral classification of films.” Of course, the crux of the matter was defining for a secular society what was meant by ‘moral,’ although Archbishop McQuaid had no such difficulty.

Attended by representatives from twenty-four countries, the 1955 OCIC conference was opened by McQuaid, and in keeping with his theological outlook, he affirmed a doctrinal notion of moral classification:

[B]y moral I mean, doctrinal classification, for morality is based on the doctrine that is the deposit of Faith, entrusted by her Divine Founder to the Church.<sup>13</sup>

Such a rigorous approach, expressed also by key figures in the NFI and in its publications, often linked Catholic morality with the anti-colonial struggle. Ireland, a 1954 article argued, was

being swamped by the culture and philosophy of other English-speaking peoples and [consequently, Irish] minds [were] being shaped by England and America. The constant pressure from without cannot do much harm to people old enough to remember the struggle for national independence, but our children have little protection against it.<sup>14</sup>

One measure of the success or otherwise of the NFI was whether it impacted cinema attendances. Indeed, the Irish film audience continued to grow until the mid-1950s, and its decline had less to do with the NFI than with the availability of alternative leisure activities. For the most part, the Irish press ignored the more extreme pronouncements of the NFI’s “ever active busybodies” as one newspaper described its film reviewing panels.<sup>15</sup> This may have been caused by fear of losing valuable cinema trade advertisements, or more likely newspapers still lacked full-time film reviewers who might have engaged with the NFI.

The NFI, which attempted to pursue an anti-commercial cinema agenda while simultaneously seeking to present a positive Catholic film policy, undoubtedly served a negative and retarding function in terms of the development of an internationally informed film culture in Ireland. To that end, its refusal to accommodate Devane’s vocationalist agenda, and its determination to marginalize the broad-based progressive and secular Irish Film Society, led to the situation that for thirty-five years the notion of an Irish film institute was bound up with a narrow Catholic attitude to film and sexuality.

Notwithstanding the institute's belief that their 16mm 'movement' with its eighty to one hundred parish cinemas was "a potential weapon in sufficient quantity to change the face of Ireland,"<sup>16</sup> the institute failed to impose its preoccupations on yet another generation. Indeed, by the mid-1960s, Ireland had changed to the point where the NFI was little able to influence the culture. Not only had television and other leisure activities brought new opportunities to consumers that led to a decline in cinema admissions, but the base from which the NFI had received its most loyal support—conservative, rural communities—was being eroded through emigration and internal migration. Despite the institute's attempts to adapt to the new socio-economic imperatives of modernization and internationalization through providing different types of films to industry and government training bodies, its importance as a national organization continued to decline.

Simultaneously, the Church itself was beginning to change due to the liberalization set in motion by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Even McQuaid adapted to the changing circumstances by establishing a church film unit, Radharc (View), though he kept it on a tight lease to ensure it did not explore in those films made about the Irish Church the liberation theology ideas which infused the group's Third World films. When McQuaid died in 1973, he was not replaced as NFI patron in an organization increasingly out of touch with the secular liberalism of the society.

## AFTERMATH

While the Irish Catholic Church did not fully dominate film policy during the 1940s and 1950s since the Irish Film Society remained a vibrant parallel organization, nevertheless, the NFI and its clerical allies served to inhibit the full development of film culture in Ireland. With the modernization, internationalizing and secularization of Irish society from the 1960s onwards, the NFI became moribund and largely irrelevant to changes in the film landscape. Its negativity was swept aside by a vigorous critical film culture as it began to develop from the 1970s onwards when a new generation of cine-literate cultural activists and filmmakers emerged in Ireland, and, ironically, the declining NFI invited some of them to join its governing board. While many activists were skeptical of its potential, especially as they were hardly fans of *Vigilanti cura*, which remained the NFI's terms of reference, and there was still a nun and a priest on the board, nevertheless, within two years they had taken control of the institute, secularized the constitution, and changed its name to Irish Film Institute (IFI).

Using the remaining resources of the NFI, and with the financial support of arts bodies, government agencies and European institutions, during that time a national center for film in Ireland was developed under IFI control that opened in 1992. The IFI is now one of the most vibrant cultural

institutions in the country with an annual turnover of over two million euro. It is home to three alternative/independent cinema screens; the Irish Film Archive, which preserves and makes available for research and public screening almost 30,000 cans of Irish film material, the most important such collection outside the national television broadcaster; an education department that has been central in introducing film/media studies to the national school curriculum and a bookshop/DVD store; and the complex features a popular bar and restaurant that is the meeting place for the film community in Ireland.

For the Catholic Church in Ireland, though, the downward spiral in prestige and power continues. The changing nature of the representation of Irish Catholic religious in the cinema and on television is a good marker of its decline.

One of the achievements of the “Clean Screen” campaign in the United States in the 1930s praised by Production Code Administration Chief Joseph Breen, an Irish American who worked closely with the Irish-dominated American Catholic Church (see Chapter 3), was the emergence of the Irish Catholic priest as a major screen character with a positive moral compass, most effectively seen in *Angels with Dirty Faces* (Curtiz, 1938). There, Catholic priest Pat O’Brien is contrasted with childhood friend and gangster James Cagney. In films such as *Boys Town* (Taurog, 1938) and *Men of Boys Town* (Taurog, 1941), which feature Spencer Tracy as the real-life Irish-born priest Father Edward J. Flanagan, and the very popular *Going My Way* (McCarey, 1944) and *The Bells of St Mary’s* (McCarey, 1945), the only film known to have been praised by Archbishop McQuaid, the priest is generally seen as above reproach. As is the case, though, in even a Hollywood religious genre film such as *Bells*, there is more than a hint of sexual chemistry between priest Bing Crosby and nun Ingrid Bergman. Such is their obvious love for each other as represented through endless flirtation that they would have kissed were they in another genre. While these dramas proved successful, and *On the Waterfront* (Kazan, 1954), with Karl Malden as the priest, was selected as the OCIC’s film of the year at its 1955 Dublin conference, a more critical cinematic view of Irish Catholic religious began to be produced from the 1970s onwards. This new view of Catholicism was initiated perhaps by Fred Schepisi’s *The Devil’s Playground* (1976), in which the celibate inmates of an Australian seminary are shown to be rife with sexual repression and religious doubts.

It was not until the 1990s, though, that the full extent of the warped sexuality of some Catholic clergy would find its most damning public expression when a series of media exposures and court cases of the pedophilic activities of Catholic religious gained a central slot in public consciousness following television documentary exposes and drama representations. These often-challenging films concerning sexual and physical abuse by religious of children in their care, such as the Canadian *Boys*

of *St. Vincent* (Smith, 1992), the Irish-produced *The Magdalen Sisters* (Mullan, 2001) and the American *Doubt* (Shanley, 2008), and landmark documentaries made by Irish and British television in the 1990s and 2000s, have transformed how the Catholic Church is viewed.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the forced resignation of bishops, in Ireland and elsewhere, as a result of covering up pedophile activities in their dioceses, and damning government inquiries, have all led to a situation where the once-powerful and unchallenged Irish Catholic Church has lost the moral stature in which it was once held. As a result, Catholic influence on film, or other, policies has been marginalized in a society that has chosen to embrace secular liberalism, the market economy and consumerism, without much reflective, not to mention, spiritual, sense of capitalism's own often-destructive features.

## NOTES

1. For a more extended account of the issues discussed here, see Rockett, Kevin with Emer Rockett. 2011. *Film Exhibition and Distribution in Ireland, 1909–2010*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 293–365.
2. See Devane, Richard. 1948. *The Failure of Individualism: A Documented Essay*. Dublin: Richview/Browne and Nolan, 1948.
3. Cahill, Edward. 1930. *Ireland's Peril*. Dublin: M.H. Gill, 21.
4. Pastoral issued March 2, 1924, quoted in *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1925: 559.
5. Pastoral issued September 29, 1927, *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1928: 605.
6. Pastoral address, August 15, 1927, *Acta et decreta concilii plenarii episcoporum Hiberniae*, 15 Augusti 1927, Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1929:142
7. See Rockett, Kevin. 2004. *Irish Film Censorship: A Cultural Journey from Silent Cinema to Internet Pornography*. Dublin: Four Courts Press; Rockett, Kevin. "Protecting the family and the nation: The official reception of American cinema in Ireland 1923–1954." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 20, no. 3 (August 2000): 283–300; and Rockett, Kevin. 2012. "Irish film censorship: The fractured family of foreign films" in Daniel Biltereyst and Roel Vande Winkel, eds. *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship around the World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 207–220.
8. "The cinema," *The Irish Press*, January 23, 1935:10.
9. For a detailed account of the controversy, see Rockett, Kevin. "From radicalism to conservatism: Contradictions within Fianna Fail film policies in the 1930s." *Irish Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2001): 155–165.
10. 'Jesuit's plea for reform of cinema,' *Irish Press*, February 16, 1935: 9.
11. *The Cinema*, June 26, 1935: 24.
12. Catholic Action was the term applied to the activities of lay Catholics who promoted greater Catholic influence on society. It emerged as a movement in the nineteenth century to counter anti-clerical and leftist secular influences in countries that historically had been exclusively Catholic or had Catholic-dominated states, such as Spain, Italy, France and Belgium.
13. Archbishop McQuaid, "Address of His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin to the International Catholic Cinema Congress," *National Film Quarterly* 5, no. 5 (September 1955): 11.

14. "Films for children," *National Film Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (December 1953–January 1954): 5.
15. Quoted, *National Film Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (March 1956): 6–7.
16. Seamus O'Connor, "Jottings," *Irish Film Quarterly* 2, no.4 (January 1959): 7–9.
17. See Rockett, Kevin. 2011. "Contesting the past in Irish film and television" in Katie Holmes and Stuart Ward, eds. *Exhuming Passions: The Pressure of the Past in Ireland and Australia*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 125–142.

## 12 A Case of *Entente Cordiale* between State and Church Catholics and Film Control in Argentina (1954–1984)

*Maria Elena de las Carreras*

This chapter grew out of some initial observations during research about cinema and politics in Argentina in the 1980s. When examining the implementation of film control from the 1960s to the 1980s, it became evident that there was an *entente cordiale* between the State, which exerted control over films prior to their theatrical release, and the Catholic faithful involved in the process, who worked as members of successive nationwide rating commissions permitted to cut and prohibit films.

This chapter first examines in detail how film censorship functioned in Argentina between 1968 and 1984 under the censorship law passed by the military regime of 1966–1973. It was applied by an autonomous federal board, which was set up in December 1968 and operated until it was replaced by a rating commission in February 1984 under the National Film Institute at the onset of Argentina's return to democratic rule in October 1983. This legislation was in place during the democratic interlude of 1973–1976, and its unconstitutionality was never questioned by the democratically elected *Partido Justicialista*, the party of former strongman Juan Domingo Perón, and winner of the 1973 general elections. Censorship practices that involved the banning and mandatory cuts of domestic and international productions for theatrical release were regulated under law 18.019. It codified provisions regarding the portrayal of sexuality, crime and violence, as well as the treatment of religion, and political issues deemed a threat to “national security.”<sup>1</sup>

The connection between this censorship board, called the *Ente de Calificación Cinematográfica*, and the Church was made explicit only by a list of the Catholic institutions that would provide members. It is significant, however, that the board was led for the first ten years by Ramiro de Lafuente, a staunch Catholic who was close to the Church's hierarchy through his involvement with the influential *Acción Católica* (Catholic Action). As a dedicated administrator, Ramiro de Lafuente shaped and structured the board's operations by continuing the work he had already begun as head of the *Concejo Honorario de Contralor Cinematográfico* (Honorary Board of Film Control) between 1963 and 1968. The new board carried out its mandatory rating activity based on the traditional Catholic teachings concerning



sexual morality. In fact, the decisions often even made direct reference to values embedded in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The study of how Argentine Catholics engaged in State-run film control from the 1960s until the watershed legislation of 1984 has been mostly based on journalistic and legal accounts, reminiscences and anecdotes peppered with a strong ideological flavor—which to varying degrees are examples of hostility against the Catholic Church. The most important exception to these Spanish-language narratives, which include general studies and documentary films on censorship and the arts, is the recent research of Argentine sociologist Fernando Ramírez Llorens from the University of Buenos Aires. His field of inquiry is the relationship between the State, the Church and entrepreneurs in Argentine cinema between 1955 and 1976—two decades bracketed by the demise of the autocratic Juan Domingo Perón regime and the military coups of 1966 and 1976.<sup>2</sup>

Drawing on a variety of official and private sources, many of which were untapped until now, Ramírez Llorens challenges the tunnel vision created by the heavily anecdotal and partisan approach of previous accounts. He notes that Catholic involvement in cinema—specifically, the contribution of lay Catholics—should be seen as a dual activity: the control and promotion of cinema within a context rooted in Church teaching on culture and mass communications that follows the larger trends of the universal Church.

The impact of Ramírez Llorens' parallel approach has shaped and enlarged the scope of this chapter. Moreover, the chapter benefits from the broader picture emerging from his work, which includes the work of Catholics within the Church from the 1930s through to the early 1960s, many of whom were members of the censorship boards from 1963 until 1984. This approach also brings the involvement of Catholics into a sharper focus. It includes continuity in the work of the various organizations in charge of film promotion and control; the progressive bifurcation of these two activities, due in part to changing ideas about cinema as an art form, and its connection with morality and the hardening of the State's censorship stance in the 1970s when the loosening of content in cinema—sex, violence and the specific political context of the country—was dealt with in an authoritarian manner, mainly through the excising of material deemed objectionable. In the context of a post-military Argentina walking the path of secular liberal modernization, the impact of the Catholic Church has been negligible. Moreover, there was only one representative from the Bishops' Conference at the federal *Comisión Asesora de Exhibiciones Cinematográficas* (Advisory Board on Film Exhibition). In a rating's board with representatives from the Ministries of Education, Social Welfare and Interior, plus two functionaries from the film institute and one representative each from the Jewish and Protestant communities, a single Catholic vote could only have limited influence.

## CATHOLIC INVOLVEMENT IN CINEMA

As has been noted elsewhere in this book, the Encyclical *Vigilanti cura* promulgated by Pope Pius XI in 1936 (see Chapters 1 and 2) is a key Church document that explains how the motion pictures were understood as the art form of the twentieth century, and as a tool for evangelization. By making a passionate call for Catholics to understand cinema as a powerful form of mass communication in the modern world, the Encyclical championed the work undertaken by U.S. Catholics through the Legion of Decency, founded in 1934. It discussed its impact on the film industry's Hays Code of self-censorship through its efforts to use cinema as a morally ordered means of entertainment. In the language of the time, the Encyclical was an invitation to 'moralize' the movies (Chapter 3).

The reception of *Vigilanti cura* in Argentina should be understood within the context of the Catholic revitalization that took place in the country from the 1920s onward. The seeds of the Catholic university were sown with the creation of the *Cursos de Cultura Católica* (Courses of Catholic Culture) in 1922. The founding of *Criterio*, a respected weekly magazine on faith, culture and politics in 1928, provided a focal point for a new generation of young Catholic intellectuals.<sup>3</sup> The highlight of this period was the International Eucharistic Congress of 1934, an impressive testimony of faith across the social spectrum, and the beginning of an assertive Catholic presence in the public sphere.

In *Catholicism and Politics in Argentina, 1810–1960*, the British Church historian Austen Ivereigh examines the particularities of this renewal, which also took place in the Church worldwide. He understands it as an expression of the theological debate present since the birth of this Hispanic nation in 1810, a conflict "between differing philosophical conceptions of political society."<sup>4</sup> To put it succinctly, as it relates to cinema, the clash between a liberalism rooted in the Enlightenment, in which the only legitimate source of power lies in the State, such as responsibility for education and culture, and the 'scholastic framework' that shapes a Catholic understanding of political involvement. Based on St. Augustine's notion of two differing realms—a City of Man, secular and temporal, and a City of God, spiritual and eternal—activities related to the human person, like education and culture, are a prerogative of the latter, and can only be delegated to the former, never abdicated.

Consequently, *Vigilanti cura* should be read both historically and theologically as an invitation to Argentine Catholics to participate in this new form of mass entertainment. Their response looked to the trail blazed by American Catholics vis-à-vis Hollywood. The encyclical provided the impetus to *Acción Católica Argentina* (Argentine Catholic Action, ACA) to commence an active presence in the area of cinema. It had been founded in 1931 and followed its French and Italian counterparts in creating a space for lay participation in the public forum. Ivereigh notes that Catholic

Action should be seen as an example of the worldwide strategy by Pope Pius XI to “unify Catholic organizations in an umbrella group intended to be rigorously apolitical, subordinate to the hierarchy and sufficiently disciplined to command a loyalty that could compete with the absolute demands of the State.”<sup>5</sup>

Within this frame of 1930s Catholic activism, *Acción Católica* set up a *Secretariado de Moralidad* (Secretariat of Morality) to rate films, among other functions. In 1937, Catholic Action and the widely circulated Catholic newspaper *El Pueblo* began to work together on reviewing and rating films for theatrical release. In 1954, Ramiro de Lafuente, by then a well-respected lawyer in Catholic circles and a specialist in canon law, became head of the Secretariat of Morality. He created the *Oficina*, later *Dirección, Central de Cine y Teatro* (Central Office, later Direction, of Cinema and Theater), which functioned between 1954 and 1965 to engage more actively with the promotion of cinema, including alternative exhibition spaces, such as parish cinemas and a burgeoning *cineclub* scene.

Ramírez Llorens has examined the work of *Dirección* in order to understand the logic with which it rated hundreds of films during its eleven years of activity. He notes that a debate about whether the Catholic reviewers were prudish or conservative in their assessments should be the subject of another, different, type of study. On the other hand, he emphasizes that it is crucial to link this activity to the notions of cinema and morality espoused, debated and contested at that time by Catholic circles.<sup>6</sup>

The practical work of rating pictures was done by teams of two married couples, who attended the theatrical release of the films in Buenos Aires, Rosario and other cities; wrote a report to the director and issued one of six ratings: Acceptable for all; Acceptable for adolescents; Acceptable for adults; With reservations; Unadvisable; Forbidden to all. By 1956, there were twenty-seven couples reviewing films on a voluntary basis. The *Dirección* was in contact with similar offices from other countries, including the United States, Mexico, Uruguay, France, Spain and Cuba. It issued a biweekly sheet with ratings and reviews, which was distributed to parishes and Catholic organizations on a subscription basis. Ramírez Llorens comments on the seriousness and professionalism with which this activity was carried out under the direction of de Lafuente. It was a mission of careful vigilance, in the spirit of the Encyclical, undertaken along lines similar to those of its US and European counterparts. In a personal communication with the author, Ignacio de Lafuente corroborated his father's dedication to the task, to which he provided his own financial resources.

The rating work done by married couples with children, who were active in Catholic Action and organizations such as *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano* (Christian Family Movement), was intended as an orientation for families, and understood as the fulfillment of a Catholic's apostolate mission. Interviews I conducted with the then-young members of these teams—who are now lawyers and doctors in their eighties—present a still vivid view of their

experience, with fond recollections of evenings spent at screening rooms, while managing busy lives with small children. They volunteered time and resources with a strong and youthful sense of mission.<sup>7</sup>

After a close analysis of the 5401 films rated by Catholic Action between 1954 and 1964, including extensive discussions of representative cases, Ramírez Llorens observes that there were three areas of concern for the Catholic reviewers: the representation of sexuality; the portrayal of religious values, including marriage and family; and the questioning of the social and political, mainly Communism as understood in the context of the Cold War.

By the late 1950s, however, the cultural and intellectual changes developing in Western Europe and the United States—a process of modernization shaped by a crisis of authority and the advance of secularization—reached the Argentine coasts. The renovations in film language and techniques originating in Italy and France in the 1950s had an impact on local cinema circles in production as well as criticism. This atmosphere of cinematographic renewal has been extensively researched by Argentine film scholars.<sup>8</sup>

It was at this time that the Catholic twofold engagement with cinema—promotion and control, as epitomized by Catholic Action—began to split in two. The landmark Apostolic Exhortation of Pius XII on the ideal film to representatives of the Italian film industry on June 21, 1955, was emblematic of a shift in the debate about cinema and morality in Catholic circles all over the world. International institutions such as the *Organisation Catholique Internationale du Cinéma* (International Catholic Film Organization, OCIC), founded in 1928 and which reemerged strongly after the Second World War (Chapter 1), proposed a different way of understanding the relationship between art and morality, based on the autonomy of the temporal realities. The demise of the Legion of Decency in the United States also showed that the model of engagement proposed in *Vigilanti cura* two decades earlier was no longer effective.<sup>9</sup>

In Argentina, the changes led the local Catholic Church to take a different direction from the United States and Western Europe, and the research of Fernando Ramírez Llorens shows how this happened. As a result of the *entente cordiale* between the State and the Church, the Catholic hierarchy quietly gained a decisive role in matters concerning education and culture. The first film control legislation at the federal level, empowered by decrees 62/1957, 9660/1959, 5797/1961 and 8205/63, guaranteed the increased participation of Catholic organizations in the rating commission. Likewise, in 1963, this move instituted something new by giving the federal censorship board's newly appointed director Ramiro de Lafuente the power to demand cuts and prohibit films in the three areas of concern to Catholic Action—namely sexual, religious and political matters.

Ramiro de Lafuente's tenure at the Catholic Action's Direction of Film and Theater and subsequent federal boards illustrates this continuity. When asked by the archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Antonio Caggiano, de Lafuente accepted an appointment as director of the first federal censorship

board, created in 1963 as the *Consejo Honorario de Contralor Cinematográfico* (Honorary Board of Film Control, CHCC). When, in 1968, the CHCC was replaced by the *Ente Nacional de Calificación Cinematográfica* (National Film Rating Board), de Lafuente again became its first director. For all intents and purposes, the Catholic Action rating commission—which since the 1930s had accumulated valuable experience in advising the Catholic faithful on the moral suitability of films—became a governmental organization with administrative powers to control the circulation of cinema by means of cuts and prohibitions. Moving in the opposite direction from its US and French counterparts, the Argentine Catholic Action became a de facto governmental organization.

This seismic shift in *modus operandi* generated a heated public discussion, led in Catholic circles by Jaime Potenze, the film critic of *Criterio* magazine and the then-president of *Círculo de periodistas cinematográficos* (Association of Film Journalists). Ramírez Llorens notes that Potenze drew attention to the lack of professional qualifications of the Catholics participating in the rating commission, pointing out their ambiguous role as representatives of both the Church and the State (personal communication to the author on October 10, 2013). This public debate was an example of the split between Catholic groups using State institutions to ‘moralize’ cinema, and those engaging with it from a Catholic perspective through publications, *cineclubs*, awards and alternative exhibition spaces.

## THE 1968 CENSORSHIP LEGISLATION

In order to fully understand the relationship between the military regime, which passed the repressive 1968 censorship law, and the Catholic censors, who were volunteers from the Argentine Catholic Action, the *Movimiento Familiar Cristiano* and other Catholic organizations such as *Liga de Madres* (League of Mothers) and *Liga de Padres de Familia* (League of Fathers), it is necessary to examine the intellectual roots of this legislation. Likewise, understanding the political and religious ideas shared by the military leadership and the Catholic faithful involved in preparing this legislation is also key.

When discussing how the Catholic revitalization process began in the 1920s, Austen Ivereigh describes the birth of a small but politically influential thread in Argentine Catholicism: Catholic nationalists. Reacting to the materialism and secularism coming from French and British ideas about modernity, this group argued that the cornerstone of Argentina’s identity was rooted in its Hispanic and Catholic origins. Writers and public figures such as Manuel Gálvez and Carlos Ibarguren, who were important personalities in the development of Catholic nationalism, considered “religion as the foundation of identity and Spain as the nation’s *alma mater*,” to quote the British historian.<sup>10</sup>

Catholic nationalists found a common ground with the influential sectors of the military that had begun to absorb similar ideas, and subsequently developed a patriotic and messianic sense of self. They saw themselves as the keepers of this Catholic and Hispanic identity. This coincidence of ideas and vision between the armed forces, with a presumed right to intervene in political life, and Catholic nationalist sectors over several decades culminated in the military coup of 1966, which has been the subject of extensive research. In *For God and the Fatherland. Religion and Politics in Argentina*, the American historian Michael A. Burdick gives an in-depth and nuanced account of the Catholic Church as an “influential social institution [that] both mirrored and shaped Argentine political history” in its relationship with the State.<sup>11</sup> It provides the background for understanding the views espoused by the film censorship law of 1968, which was conceived as a crusade to moralize the movies in accordance with the Church’s moral values.

By the 1960s, Catholic nationalists and army officers shared a common pre-Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) approach to the relationship between the State and the Church. There was a consensus, shared by Catholics in general, about the role of the Church in providing moral guidance for the public. Again, for all intents and purposes, the spheres of influence of the military regime and the episcopacy overlapped in matters of culture, education and public mores.

Carlos Onganía, head of the military junta between 1966 and 1970, was a staunch Catholic who participated in the *Cursillista* movement of religious renewal. Founded in Spain in 1944 to encourage lay leadership, the *Cursillos de Cristiandad* (Catholic Adult Education) was, as a new movement, not unlike other Catholic organizations started in Spain, a passionate response to their times, such as Ignacio de Loyola’s Society of Jesus in the sixteenth century, and José María Escrivá de Balaguer’s Opus Dei in the late 1920s.

Under the Onganía regime, the Catholics behind the censorship law and the military who had become active participants in the country’s political life since the 1930s shared the notion that both the Catholic Church and the armed forces were the repository of ‘Argentineness’ and, as such, protectors of Argentina’s national identity (*‘ser nacional’*). These ideas were explicitly presented in the memo attached to bill 18.019, dated March 25, 1968, signed by Minister of Interior Guillermo A. Borda and Secretary of Culture and Education José María Astigueta. The memo, in fact, became the preface to the law, passed on December 24, 1968. It would be a challenge to find another official document in which this Catholic discourse is more effectively summarized.

Acting in this spirit of crusade, the Onganía government replaced the existing federal film rating legislation with a law emblematic of the new autocracy. The preface outlines its purpose—the protection of filmgoers from the misuses of cinema—and mentions the Hays Office as a successful mediator between the film industry and the government.<sup>12</sup>

The missionary zeal of the censorship board was made public during the press conference in which Minister Borda presented the law:

This is the first step in taking measures that will also involve radio, television, theater and magazines. The purpose is not to stifle artistic creation but to fend off its pushing of boundaries and violence. [Banning pornography] is integral to the philosophy of the Argentine Revolution, and for this reason the government will not cease in this effort; it has the support of the Argentine people, tired of eroticism, violence and immorality. (. . .) What is new [in law 18.019 of December 1968] is that now films can be prohibited, something that did not happen until now, since there could only be mandated cuts. (. . .). The Pope has been very clear about the need to intervene in the censorship of shows.<sup>13</sup>

The Onganía government delegated the preparation of the censorship law to influential Catholics, including Ramiro de Lafuente. Reminiscent in its wording and moral underpinnings of the 1930s US Production Code, this law became one of the weapons wielded against the dislocations of the 1960s, reflected in foreign and domestic cinema.

## ROOTS OF THE CENSORSHIP LAW

The immediate antecedents of law 18.019 can be found in legislation already in place in Spain and France, where mandatory exhibition permits were required. Censorship of the media in Spain was a feature of the Francisco Franco regime from the late 1930s to the mid-1970s. From the end of its brutal civil war (1936–1939) to his death in November 1975, General Franco ruled Spain with an iron hand. Right-wing politics, nationalism, Catholicism and the shift toward economic liberalism in the 1960s shaped his autocratic regime, or *franquismo*. Stability was achieved at the expense of political liberties, and censorship was exerted from the beginning. Even though restrictions eased over time and accommodations were reached between official censors and the media, film censorship played a defining role in the history of Spanish cinema, as the cases of Luis Buñuel and Carlos Saura, among many others, attest.<sup>14</sup>

Censorship guidelines were codified by the *Normas de Censura Cinematográfica* (Norms for Film Censorship) and issued by the Ministry of Information in February 1963. They comprised two parts: first, a general outline about cinema and its portrayal of moral issues; second, a detailed list of themes which could lead to the prohibition of films. These provisions dealt with sexuality, crime and violence, and prescribed the handling of social, political and religious institutions.

A comparison between the phrasing of the 1963 *Normas* and the Argentine law leaves no doubt that the Franco legislation was closely followed. In fact, the Onganía regime wanted to model itself after *franquismo* in its later

years—market economy, technological modernization and cultural conservatism. The Catholics advising the military government shared this goal, and the authoritarian *franquista* model was deemed a desirable course of action for Argentina.

The French legislation, in place since 1945, was a more indirect antecedent. The activities and responsibilities of the *Commission de contrôle cinématographique* (Commission of Film Control) were established in decree 61–62 of January 18, 1961, along with details of a rating system according to age categories. Composed of representatives from the State, the film industry and experts on children and youth issues, the commission was allowed to request cuts from the films or ban them altogether. The final rating, however, was issued by the Minister of Culture, acting on the advice of the commission. As noted by Jean-François Théry, over the course of time, and thanks to specific directions from successive ministers of culture, no cuts have been required, nor any films prohibited since 1981.<sup>15</sup>

The 1968 Argentine law and French legislation share the notion that a state organization is responsible for policing societal mores susceptible to being affected by screen images. The means to enforce transgressions against agreed-upon standards of decency are cuts and prohibitions. While the French practice gradually evolved away from such procedures, which are still available but not enforced under current decree 90–174, of February 23, 1990, the Argentine Censorship Board clung to the provisions of a Spanish-style law, and was subsequently voted out of existence.

The Argentine censors—who saw themselves as the last bastion in a crusade for moralizing the movies—were unable or unwilling to evolve along the French lines. The Anglo-Saxon model, as exemplified by the self-regulatory systems in place in the United Kingdom and the United States, was never part of the equation.

The board members entrenched themselves behind regulations that became increasingly impossible for a large number of domestic and international films to meet. Cuts and prohibitions attempted to stem the escalation in sex and violence that characterized the 1970s. In the short term, the censors succeeded in deterring the import of exploitation films and pornography. In the long term, however, the forced status quo could not be sustained. As practiced in Argentina and Franco's Spain, censorship was undertaken with the belief that the loosening of morals on the screen could be avoided, even eliminated, through the strict enforcement of legislation. Numerous interviews and statements by successive directors of the censorship board have continued to reflect these convictions.<sup>16</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE CENSORSHIP LAW

Passed by a *de facto* government, the constitutionality of law 18.019 was not questioned by the democratically elected governments of 1973–1976, and the law remained in force during the military regime of 1976–1983, until its repeal by a democratically elected congress in February 1984.



The introduction to the bill voices concern about “the influence of cinema on the mores of large sectors of the population, especially the youth.” It is therefore “reasonable to seek solutions in order to avoid the distortion of cinema’s noble mission, so that films are not at the service of social disorder and shady interests.”<sup>17</sup>

Article 1 states that no restrictions should be placed on the freedom of film expression in the production and exhibition of cinema nationwide. However, a strong caveat immediately follows: restrictions could be enforced for “educational” reasons when required for the preservation of “public morality” and “national security.”

Article 2 lists the subjects that were prohibited in films, or in the film’s scenes:

1. Justification of adultery or, in general, anything attacking matrimony and the family.
2. Justification of abortion, prostitution and sexual perversions.
3. Presentation of lascivious scenes or scenes in violation of morality (*las buenas costumbres*).
4. Justifications for crimes.
5. Those that deny the duty of defending the country and the right of its authorities to exact it.
6. Those that undermine national security, affect relations with friendly nations or harm the interest of the basic institutions of the State.

Article 9 created an agency to enforce these restrictions, the *Ente de Calificación Cinematográfica*, a film censorship board composed of a general director, two adjunct directors, a secretary and an honorary advisory council of fifteen members, nine of whom were appointed by the executive branch. They included one representative each from the Ministries of Interior and Defense, two representatives from the Secretariat of Culture and Education, three from Diffusion and Tourism and two from the Secretariat of Information. The remaining six members represented private institutions and Catholic organizations, whose areas of concern were the family and children’s needs.<sup>18</sup> There were no representatives from the film industry, nor was competence in film a requirement. The members received no pay for their work. Article 11 established a model for how the advisory council would function in *salas*, or small committees of three members each. After viewing the assigned films, they submitted their written opinions to the director or the adjunct directors, who made the final decision and signed the rating certificate.

The censorship board could classify a picture in one of the following categories: Without restrictions; Forbidden for minors under 14; Forbidden for minors under 18; Banned.

Two disturbing facts about the law were noted by *Criterio*, the leading Catholic magazine of culture and politics: first, cinema was not viewed as a cultural activity, since there were no representatives from universities and academies, film critics or writers capable of appreciating the significance

and the artistic quality of cinema; and second, a moral statute with explicit provisions, similar to the Hays Code, could be a yardstick to eliminate the 'faults' committed by films, rather than a means to indicate an advisable level of maturity.<sup>19</sup>

Vocal reactions to the censorship of cinema and other media erupted. The Catholic media, led by *Criterio*, contributed significantly to the debate. In a 1981 editorial, it discussed in depth the criteria by which the freedom of film expression had been unconstitutionally curtailed. It argued that even setting aside the notion of national security, which is open to widely varying interpretations, the concept of public morality and mores posed formidable challenges to a pluralistic society like Argentina, subject to external influences and immersed in rapid cultural changes. If one sector, however well meaning, was given the exclusive task of enforcing a code of behavior with a narrow understanding of public morality, there was the danger of presenting standards of private morality as the societal norm. The mindset of the censors operated on the premise that Argentine adults were morally and ideologically at the level of children, and therefore incapable of an intelligent discernment between good and evil, between propaganda cinema and films that discussed ideas, however controversial.

The potential for abuse in this legislation was promptly dissected in legal journals. Germán Bidart Campos, a distinguished jurist and professor of constitutional law, observed that the codification of standards for cinema was fraught with dangers, also noting that the application by censors of norms involving public morality and national security could easily degenerate into arbitrariness, since films or scenes were open to more than one interpretation. Carlos Colautti also recorded similar arguments made at the time.

## THE WORKINGS OF THE CENSORSHIP BOARD

The Censorship Board operated with a highly visible profile, which was represented by the strong figure of its director. Its task was undertaken with remarkable stability over the agency's fifteen years of existence. There was no noticeable break between the way it operated during the military regimes and the democratically elected interregnum of 1973–1976. The organization was headed by Ramiro de Lafuente until his resignation in 1973; Octavio Getino (1973) was appointed by the Peronist government; then Miguel Paulino Tato (1974–1978) and Alberto León (1978–1984).

Ramiro de Lafuente continued the policies set in place during his tenure at Catholic Action, which were designed both to advise about the moral qualities of cinema and to influence Catholic attendance at the movies. Now at the helm of an administrative organization, with de facto judicial power over the circulation of films, he used the law to enforce its provisions, as is examined later in the pattern of cuts and prohibitions.<sup>20</sup>

His successor, Octavio Getino, a radicalized filmmaker and left-wing Peronist ideologue, and member along with Fernando Solanas of the *Grupo Cine Liberación*, presented a striking contrast during his three-month tenure. He was appointed interventor by the leftist Peronist José Cámpora administration on a temporary basis, with the mandate to prepare a new rating system and repeal the restrictive provisions of the 1968 law. After a legal brouhaha ensued following the authorization to release Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1973) uncut, he was briskly removed.<sup>21</sup>

Subsequently, the right-leaning Peronist administration of María Estela Martínez de Perón appointed veteran film critic Miguel Paulino Tato. Writing at the time for the Catholic newspaper *Esquiú*, Tato had since the 1930s become known as a witty, polemical and well-established figure championing quality domestic productions, with a first-hand understanding of the business side of cinema. He immediately became a polarizing figure for cutting and banning an unprecedented number of films. An outspoken advocate of the need to 'sanitize' the screens to protect the moral and cultural health of the population, the film critic turned censor brought both a professional knowledge and a paternalistic approach to the task. In his seventies at the time of his tenure, Tato's views were identified with conservative Catholic ideas. Unlike de Lafuente, Tato enjoyed the legitimacy conferred by an appointment made by a civilian government, and was endorsed by the military regime after the coup of March 1976.<sup>22</sup>

After Miguel Tato retired in 1978, Alberto León, a board member of the Catholic *Liga de Padres de Familia* (League of Fathers), was appointed director. It was a tenure during which the censorship board stayed on course.<sup>23</sup>

An analysis of the films objected to by the censorship board during its fifteen years of existence provides examples of how it operated in specific instances. In March 1984, the film critic Jorge Miguel Couselo was appointed to liquidate the board. He did so by compiling a list of 725 titles to be released with cuts, prohibited or never released. This list was drawn from records kept by the agency in the form of files and cards, which had been transferred to the film institute at the time of Couselo's appointment in January 1984. The list did not purport to be complete, as he noted in a letter accompanying the report, dated March 15, 1984.<sup>24</sup>

Although complete official statistics about the censorship board remain unavailable, some educated guesses are useful. It can be estimated that approximately 4500 titles were submitted to the censors over a period of fifteen years, which is an average of 300 a year. This figure is the low number of annual releases in Argentina. The percentage of films issued with mandatory cuts or banned—725 titles—is 16 percent.

An examination of the data shows that of the 725 titles, 393 films (or 54 percent) requested a rating but did not receive one. The classification box is empty. Presumably, the distributors decided to withdraw them after a process of unofficial consultation with the censors about the potential rating. Or it could be that the rating process did not proceed due to other

unrecorded factors. For all intents and purposes, these films were regarded as having an unofficial ban, since without a rating, they could not be exhibited. Further examination shows that 332 films (46 percent) obtained one of the four ratings established by law 18.019. Also, that 289 films of the 332 rated were initially prohibited but were later rerated, with the following results: 217 were forbidden for those under the age of eighteen, with mandated cuts; fifty-five were forbidden for those under the age of eighteen; four were forbidden for those under the age of fourteen; two were approved without restrictions and eleven prohibitions were upheld. Of the 289 initial bans, therefore, 278 were lifted and only a handful remained prohibited. Of the nineteen films that were explicitly banned: fourteen received the banned rating, while the remaining five were first authorized and later prohibited on political grounds. Fifty-three exhibition permits were cancelled, only seven of which were later restored.

Three facts can be concluded from this data. First, more than half of the 725 films submitted for rating never obtained any classification, which resulted in a *de facto* prohibition, since films could not be released without one. Second, and conversely, 90 percent of the pictures rated were released with the required cuts. Third, fewer than twenty titles remained explicitly banned.

An analysis of the films yields conclusions that match the law's objectives. First, that pornography and exploitation films were not allowed; likewise, the domestic and foreign cinema with controversial subject matter, or strong images of sex, crime and violence, was deterred. Second, the type of censorship most used in rated films was the cutting of scenes. Finally, ideological censorship was exerted on political and religious grounds.<sup>25</sup>

Among the 393 unrated titles, there were 117 erotic and exploitation titles, including Brazilian sexploitation films, or *pornochanchadas*, and the erotic and pseudo-political Spanish *destape* cinema that exploded immediately after the death of Francisco Franco in 1975. Approximately 240 films were considered to show excessive gore, violence, drug use and sexual perversions. A handful of examples include *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1974), *Pascual Duarte* (Ricardo Franco, 1976), *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (Richard Brooks, 1977), *A un dios desconocido* (*To an Unknown God*, Jaime Chávarri, 1977), *Pretty Baby* (Louis Malle, 1978) and *Dawn of the Dead* (George A. Romero, 1979). The rest of the unrated 393 films were cases of ideological censorship: leftist content, the portrayal of the Catholic Church or because they featured exiled Argentine actors.

The fifty-three films whose permits were cancelled—again a *de facto* prohibition—also constituted an eclectic mix that featured strong erotic and violent images, and included political cinema, such as Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967) and Costa Gavras' *État de Siège* (*State of Siege*, 1973).

An examination of the 393 films that were refused permits shows that the outright banning of films was not the preferred policy of the censorship board. That more than half of the films submitted for rating did not receive

any classification shows that these titles were, in all likelihood, seen by the board on a consultation basis and received a verbal opinion. The distributors would then have decided whether to accept the rating, comply with the requested cuts, if any, or just not release the film. Contracts for the purchase of foreign titles had special censorship clauses protecting the buyers. This policy of informal consultation with the board operated, then, as a dissuasive factor, affecting not just the films submitted, but also the films to be bought abroad. The dissuasive factor triggered the reactive practice of distributors buying international films, in which they followed certain unwritten guidelines about what had or had not met the censorship standards.

In contrast, the model of censorship used most frequently in the 332 rated films was the cutting of objectionable images. Cuts affected sex and gore scenes in 217 films, some of which were released in versions fifteen and twenty minutes shorter, like Bernardo Bertolucci's *La Luna* (*Luna*, 1979) and William Friedkin's *Cruising* (1980). Other examples include Federico Fellini's *Satyricon* (1969), *If . . .* (1969), Robert Altman's *M.A.S.H.* (1970) and Louis Malle's *Le souffle au coeur* (*Murmur of the Heart*, 1971).

Ideological censorship was undertaken according to clear political and religious guidelines. Examples of films censored include the works of Argentine and Latin American directors presenting a Peronist or leftist interpretation of history and politics, such as *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1968) and *México, la revolución congelada* (*Mexico, The Frozen Revolution*, Raymundo Gleyzer, 1970). Several European films that presented sympathetic portrayals of the left were prohibited at first and then later released—for example, Nikita Mikhalkov's *Raba lyubvi* (*A Slave of Love*, 1976), *La Chinoise* (1967) and Jaime Camino's *Las largas vacaciones del 36* (*The Long Vacations of 1936*, 1975). A particularly intriguing case was the initial prohibition of *Czlowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*, 1977), Andrzej Wajda's devastating critique of Polish Communism in the 1950s.

The rating procedure was never completed for some political films. This affected the release of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Novecento* (1977) and *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (*The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta, 1975). Two critiques of *franquismo* stand out: Luis García Berlanga's anti-Franco satire *La escopeta nacional* (*The National Shotgun*, 1977) and Antonio Mercero's *La Guerra de papá* (*Daddy's War*, 1977), a child's view of the Franco faction on the Civil War, featuring Argentine exiled actor Héctor Alterio.

Five out of nineteen prohibitions fell on political films that were perceived to pose a threat to national security, among them Sergei Eisenstein's *Stachka* (*Strike*, 1924), *État de siège* (*State of Siege*, 1973), Costa-Gavras' account of Uruguayan guerrilla kidnapping tactics in the 1970s and Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971).

Fifteen films that were objected to on purely religious grounds did not receive exhibition permits. A handful of these films were exploitation fare mixing erotic and religious elements; the rest were critiques of priestly and

convent life, Church institutions and historical characters, including biblical satires. In some cases, there were political elements added to the religious aspects. Among these unrated titles are *La faute de l'abbé Mouret* (*The Demise of Father Mouret*, Georges Franju, 1970), *Le moine* (*The Monk*, Ado Kyrou, 1973), *El Santo Oficio* (*The Holy Office*, Arturo Ripstein, 1974) and *Life of Brian* (Terry Jones, 1979).

## THE DEMISE OF THE CENSORSHIP BOARD

By mid-1982, a softening of the censorship standards could be felt in response to the winds of political changes triggered by the defeat of the junta in the Malvinas/Falkland war with Great Britain. It was a bellicose adventure started by the military in what many considered at the time a diversionary tactic to galvanize the population against a perceived external enemy.

Since the film censorship law was the most visible reminder of abuses against freedom of expression, it provided an easy and popular target for the presidential candidates in the general elections called by the military in October 1983. The new president, Raúl Alfonsín, from the Radical party, took swift measures to fulfill his promise. In January 1984, his administration appointed Jorge Miguel Couselo, a respected film critic and historian, to the task of liquidating the censorship board, a mission he accomplished in less than three months. In the meantime, Congress passed law 23.052, which abolished the censorship board and replaced it with an obligatory rating system to be administered by the National Film Institute. No bans or cuts could be mandated, and the protection of minors was the only guideline to classify films. With a single stroke of the pen, the film censorship era was over.

In the larger scheme of things, the replacement of the censorship board with the National Film Institute's rating commission reflected a paradigm shift: the dismantling of Catholic ideas about film and its impact on mores—as embodied in a Church institution conceived for the 1930s and later transferred lock, stock and barrel to a State organism—in favor of values espoused by a liberal secular democracy that makes personal freedom the yardstick for moral and social choices. It would be the first of many seismic social changes in contemporary Argentina since the return to the constitutional order. From his theological vantage point to understanding the politics of Church-State relations, Austen Ivereigh would later note that the clash between the City of God and the City of Man remains alive and well, albeit with new characters and a different scenario.

## CONCLUSIONS

Argentine historians, political scientists and film scholars on the left of the ideological spectrum tend to see the Catholic Church—by which they mean its hierarchy—functioning as a force against modernity, a *bloqueo*

*tradicionalista*, especially since the 1970s.<sup>26</sup> Many of them discuss the Catholic Church, and the social and intellectual work of Catholics in the public forum, in derisive or dismissive terms.

This chapter attempts to provide a factual account of how Catholics faced the aesthetic and moral challenges brought by cinema, the art form of the twentieth century. Building on the solid work of the Argentine sociologist Fernando Ramírez Llorens, probing the dynamics of engagement between the 1930s and 1950s within a Church organization designed to advise the faithful about the moral and religious suitability of cinema, the chapter examines the continuity of this work through a State organization.

The uncertain legal grounds of the censorship board created by a *de facto* regime, its ambiguous nature as an organization of the executive branch with judicial powers and the high profile of its directors made it a lightning rod in cultural matters during its fifteen years of existence.

Through the censorship board, Catholics sought to stem the flow of films perceived to be detrimental to the social fabric in the areas of sexuality, violence and specific instances of national security. The ample autonomy with which this federal censorship board functioned turned it into a powerful player in the local film industry—shaping the business of production, distribution and exhibition by brandishing scissors and withholding exhibition permits.

When the censorship board was replaced by a rating commission supervised by the film institute in 1984 that was explicitly forbidden from cutting and banning films, the era of Catholic involvement in film control was terminated. It was part of a larger trend signaling the end of an *entente cordiale* between the Church and the State.

A brief coda: ironically, the censorship board's worst fears—that the escalation of sex and violence would be unstoppable—were realized when in the aftermath of the board's demise, like Spain after Franco, the phenomenon of *destape* erupted. Disguised as cultural modernization, this tsunami of foreign and domestic trashy cinema swiftly broke the levees so zealously built. Jaime Potenze, the acerbic critic writing for *Criterio*, noted that the censors had now been replaced by “vestals of immorality” at the film institute's rating commission. They had launched a crusade to secularize the Argentine filmgoers with the same zeal of their dethroned predecessors.

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## 13 The 'Ideal Film'

### On the Transformation of the Italian Catholic Film and Media Policy in the 1950s and the 1960s

*Mariagrazia Fanchi*

In 1955, Pope Pius XII delivered two speeches on cinema that represent a fundamental passage of the Catholic Church's magisterium on cinema and the media.<sup>1</sup> In these two speeches, called *Discorsi sul film ideale* (Discourses on Ideal Film, 1955), the pope set out principles that cinema should 'ideally' follow when seeking to inspire the audience, namely excellence of contents, and the ability to serve the community, family, state and Church. Each one of these principles is subject to an in-depth analysis that draws fully on the newborn discipline of 'filmology',<sup>2</sup> and reveals the complexity of the underlying thought and cultural policies of the Italian Catholic Church regarding cinema. In particular, the two speeches clearly reveal the existence of a double view of the medium, which fed two distinct and at times contrasting pedagogic models. In the first, film is considered an educational tool, and as an 'occasional' medium of values and teachings. Film is equally valuable for what it represents, and therefore requires a foresighted assessment in order to certify the 'excellence' of its content. In the second model, film is considered an educational resource in itself, and even as a 'gift from God.' If properly explained, film is able to educate 'independently' of its content, due to the deep relationship that it establishes with the spectator. This pedagogical dialectic between education about and education through cinema created a variety of positions and expectations, and made the relationship between the Catholic Church and cinema in Italy complex and, at times, difficult to decipher.

Starting from this premise, this chapter has three objectives. First, it intends to analyze the interaction between these two cultural models in the years preceding the *Discorsi sul Film Ideale* and in reference to three essential aspects: the relationship between the ecumenical use of cinema and 'local' action, the increasing openness to the communication technologies and the mediation between modernization and conservatism and finally, the dialectic between promoting cinema and the media and controlling them. This contribution identifies the signs of the change that influenced the Catholic policy on cinema and the media during the second half of the 1950s, which led to the assertion of cinema as merely an educational 'tool' at the expense of the paradigm of cinema as a 'formative experience' in itself. Finally, this

chapter examines the consequences of the new Catholic policy on the media system in Italy, with a particular focus on the cinema crisis of the 1960s and the readjustment of the Italian media scenario.

### **EDUCATING THROUGH CINEMA OR EDUCATING ABOUT CINEMA: THE TWO APPROACHES OF THE CATHOLIC CULTURAL POLICY TOWARDS CINEMA AND THE MEDIA**

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the cultural policy of the Italian Catholic Church on cinema appeared to be characterized by a radical ambivalence, which can be summarized as the tension between a prudent and, at times, censorial approach on the one hand, and a fervent and impassioned involvement on the other hand. This ambivalence assumed multiple forms. Here we will examine three forms that, in different ways, represent the Gordian knots of the Catholic policy on cinema and the media, at least until the middle of the twentieth century. These tensions refer to the conflict between ecumenical universalism and local action, the tension between modernization and tradition and finally, the alternation between censorial control and promotional exploitation.

#### **Ecumenism and Local Action**

The first tension, which refers to the conflict between ecumenical universalism and local involvement, found exemplary expression in the development of a network of parish cinemas. If on the one hand, there was a considerable investment in the inter-war years on the development of a network of Catholic cinemas, then, on the other hand, this investment was focused only in certain areas and regions. The effectiveness of cinema's pastoral action (that is, cinema's ability to promote Christian and Catholic values) was deemed acceptable in only a few geographical areas, and was limited to a few social concerns. It was not viable as a universal model. With regard to ecumenism and localism, a detailed examination of the map of Catholic cinemas in Italy during the first half of the twentieth century is necessary, as is a study of the principles for their development.

The first sign of the existence of a network of Catholic cinemas in Italy dates from January 2, 1910, with the constitution of the Cinema Federation in Milan. This was the beginning of a circuit of cinemas which, over fifty years, grew to include 4000 cinemas, a third of all cinemas in Italy.<sup>3</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, the development of Catholic cinemas in the country matched that of so-called 'commercial' cinemas (secular profit-making cinemas). In the 1930s, while the commercial network increased and settled,<sup>4</sup> the Catholic network continued to rise significantly and reached, according to some sources,<sup>5</sup> 2000 parish cinemas by the end of the decade. This estimate has probably been rounded up considerably.<sup>6</sup> However, it is certain

that during the 1930s the Catholic Church became actively involved with cinema. This is evident in the fact that the Church prepared a series of documents (beginning with the Encyclical *Vigilanti cura*, 1936) in order to present explicitly Catholic teachings on cinema. Likewise, the Church wanted to encourage the establishment of bodies (such as the *Segretariato Generale per la Cinematografia*, or the General Secretariat for Cinema, and the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico*, or the Catholic Cinematographic Center, CCC) to coordinate and direct Catholic action. The Church also pushed for the launch of initiatives (such as the convention agreed to with the *Società Italiana Autori ed Editori*, or the Italian Association of Authors and Publishers, SIAE) to strengthen the place of Catholic cinemas within the film industry, especially in their contractual negotiations with distributors.

This growth started in the immediate post-war years and continued until the beginning of the 1960s, when the crisis in cinema was already evident.<sup>7</sup> This growth, however, was not homogenous throughout Italy. The network of Catholic movie theaters only covered a part of the Italian territory and was more widespread in northern Italy.

Even at the peak of their distribution, in the middle of the 1960s, parish cinemas were markedly regional. In 1966, 76 percent of Catholic cinemas (3363 out of 4404) were in northern Italy.<sup>8</sup>

This irregular development of Catholic movie theaters also affected the 'small-gauge' venues, which were an important part of the Church's pastoral activities. They were potentially able to bring cinema to every corner of the country, and they afforded the Catholic Church greater control over the films exhibited. In fact, in the 1950s and 1960s, Catholics monopolized

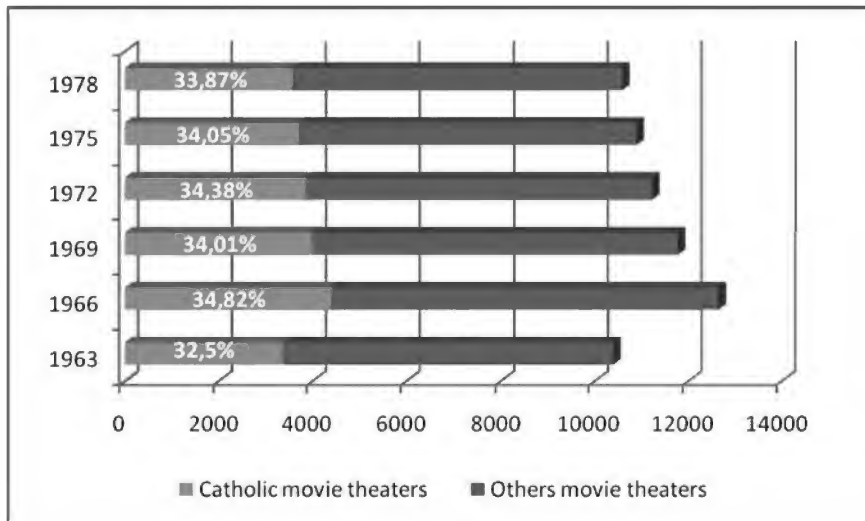


Figure 13.1 Catholic movie theaters in Italy (1963–1975; number and percentage).<sup>9</sup>

*Table 13.1 Catholic film theaters divided by main geographical areas (1966).<sup>10</sup>*

<b>Italian areas</b>	<b>Catholic movie theaters</b>
Northern Italy	3363
Central Italy	665
Southern Italy	184
Islands	192

the film ‘reduction’ processes and the distribution of 16mm film. However, despite the indubitable pedagogic and educational potential of cinemas projecting 16mm films, they, too, were concentrated in northern regions. In the mid-1960s, when 16mm Catholic cinemas had reached their highest numbers, 85 percent of cinemas were in the north.<sup>11</sup> The factors that explain this peculiar distribution of Catholic movie theaters across the national territory are naturally varied. First of all, Catholic cinemas began to flourish in the northern Italian regions. The first parish cinemas were set up in Lombardy, and the region saw the first associations and the birth of the Church’s pedagogic project on cinema.<sup>12</sup> Second, commercial cinemas were concentrated in the wealthier and more modern northern and central regions. Despite the fact that at the end of the Second World War there was a growth in cinemas in the southern regions, at the beginning of the 1960s, Lombardy boasted a cinema for every 3600 citizens, while Sicily only had one for every 7250.<sup>13</sup>

Third, there were opportunistic reasons. As I have illustrated elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> cinema in the southern regions reached only a part of the population, and excluded women and agricultural workers. Access to cinema was hindered both by logistical reasons (cinemas were found only in the large urban centers, and travel in Southern Italy could be extremely difficult) and by social barriers. Cinema was, in fact, subject to a series of economic and ethical restrictions, which made it a forbidden place for women unless accompanied by their families, husbands or fiancés. The viewing conditions, such as the darkness and the close proximity between spectators, continued to fuel suspicions of promiscuous behavior and questionable morality. Which meant that cinema was considered, in these areas of the country, inappropriate and even harmful to the Church’s mission.

### **Modernization and Tradition**

The complexity and ambivalence of the Catholic cultural policy can also be seen in the unresolved tension between modernization and tradition. While the Church was certainly an important catalyst in the modernization of the country (such as the crucial role of the Catholic associations as a rejuvenating force of the national culture), it nonetheless pushed for a prudent

modernization or, to use an effective expression coined by Raffaele DeBerti and Massimo Locatelli, "tempered modernization."<sup>15</sup> Emblematic of this was the position taken on the innovation of the technologies of communication. In Italy at the end of the 1930s, most Catholic cinemas had not made the transition to sound projectors.<sup>16</sup> This certainly involved the issue of cost, but it was also the result of a specific attitude towards cinema. In 1941, the *L'eco degli Oratori* (Oratories' Echo) encouraged such a view when it urged parish priests to purchase projectors for silent 9.5mm film, presenting it as the most suitable way to return cinema's primary function as an authentic medium of entertainment for the family.<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to observe that the approach of the Catholic Church to television was wholly different. Looking at the *Rivista del Cinematografo* (the main Catholic review on cinema and the media in Italy during those years), one is surprised by the positive and encouraging attitude towards the arrival of this new technology, and by the emphasis with which its prodigious technological developments were celebrated (even more so when compared to the critical and negative judgments launched from the pages of the other Italian cinema magazines).

The first mention of the "wonderful invention of television" can be traced back to 1932.<sup>18</sup> Interest in television increased throughout the decade, so that at the end of the 1930s, the 'Notiziario' column, which collected information on cinema and the media, featured various articles on the spread of television in the United States and Europe. News of television's progress outside of Italy during the 1940s was accompanied with a condemnation of the delay with which the Italian institutions were progressing with the new medium.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the articles made repeated calls to look at the promising fruit of "mechanical progress," represented by television, without misgivings since, as the readers were assured, it would not result in the disappearance of either radio or cinema.<sup>20</sup>

## Promotion and Control

Finally, the relationship between cinema and the Catholic Church was profoundly marked by the tension between the willingness to promote cinema and the need to exercise control over it, which in certain cases assumed the odious form of censorship. This tension was evident in the oscillations of the CCC. The CCC was set up in 1935 in order to consolidate and institutionalize the review of films, a practice that had begun in the first decade of the century. In reality, the CCC quickly assumed the role of 'nongovernment' censorship, and was able to influence the decisions of audiences in Italy and, indirectly, production and distribution trends of Italian cinema.<sup>21</sup> It must be said that, even though questionable,<sup>22</sup> the judgments of the CCC were, from the outset, inspired by an anthropocentric view of cinema.<sup>23</sup> The reviews of the first two decades of the century reveal a particular attention towards the film's spectator. At that time, there were three types of film classification: A, B and C, according to their suitability for an audience of 'youngsters.'<sup>24</sup> As parish cinemas increased their audiences, the assessment criteria became more complex: including new cases

and detailing existing cases to adapt the reviewers' work to reflect the variety of spectators that were now filling cinemas.<sup>25</sup> As of 1937, aesthetic criteria were included within the film reviewing guidelines. In that year, the '*Repertorio cinematografico*,' the column of the *Rivista del Cinematografo* that listed the judgments of the CCC, merged with '*Lo schermo*,' the criticism column. What emerged was a new way of assessing films that combined morality and artistic value, which ideally brought together in an 'organic program,' the two objectives that drove the Catholic pedagogic project on cinema: namely both educating 'through' cinema and educating 'about' cinema.

## THE NEW APPROACH TO CINEMA AND THE MEDIA

The double pedagogical aspiration that ran through and characterized the cinema policy promoted by the Catholic world became focused and clear during the 1950s and, in particular, from the second half of the decade. There were three main changes which came to fruition during this period and that redrew the relationship between the Catholic world and cinema, contributing, as shall be shown in the final part of this chapter, to changing the structure of the media system in Italy.

### An Educational Tool, But Not for Everybody

The first change was what could be called, a 'relativization' of cinema's pedagogic value. The effectiveness of cinema as an educational tool was reconsidered and restricted. Cinema could still be a useful instrument for the Church's educational objectives, and therefore continue to develop a moral conscience, but only for audiences that excluded children, people with an inadequate cultural background and women, who were singled out for exclusion. In the 1950s, female audiences (and through them, minor audiences) were literally placed under protection. This approach actually developed during the second half of the 1940s, emblematically at the same time as the universal suffrage that sanctioned the access of Italian woman in public life. This approach was shared by the left, which was equally concerned with monitoring and directing the ways in which women responded to their new freedom.<sup>26</sup> The most striking outcome of this segregation was the progressive decline in the number of women going to cinemas—a process that started at least five years before the film industry recorded its first drop in attendance, when cinema was still in its ascendancy.<sup>27</sup> The 'good press' was one of the methods used in the Catholic world to discourage female audiences. A good example of this is *Primavera* (Spring), a magazine for adolescents and young Catholic women, which contained features on books and records and even, subsequently, television, but not cinema, at least not until the 1960s. By using such tactics, the Catholic media effectively deleted cinema from female popular culture.<sup>28</sup>

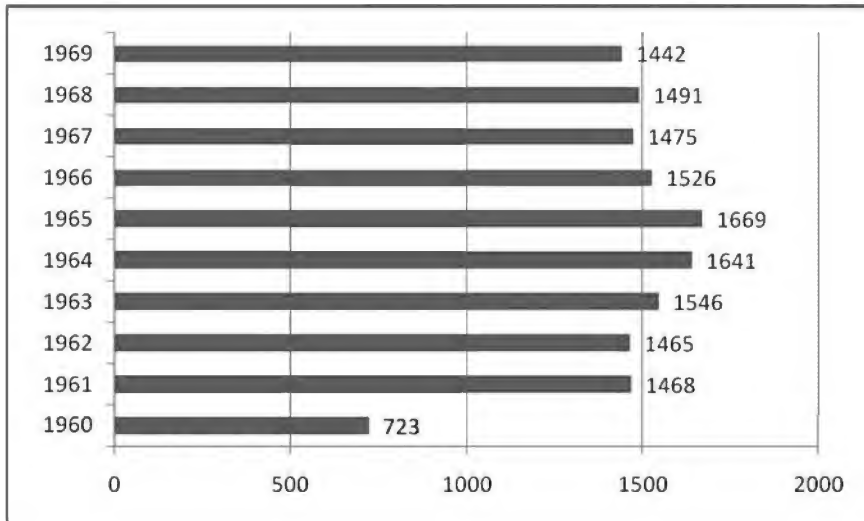


Figure 13.2 Small-gauge movie theaters in Italy (1960–1969).

Further confirmation of the redefined Catholic policy on cinema can be found in the *Rivista del cinematografo* (as explained earlier, the main Italian Catholic review magazine of the *Ente dello Spettacolo*, the institution that defined the Catholic line of action on and through cinema). During the second half of the 1950s, in contrast to the tirades contained in other Italian cinema magazines, it increased the number of interventions criticizing cinema, with articles and positive declarations about television.<sup>29</sup>

### Intervene ‘Upstream’

The second change to take place in the Catholic policy on cinema was the realization of the limits of a pedagogy concentrated exclusively on the audience and on the viewing experience. In the post-war years, the Catholic press and the Church’s teaching documents called on the public to follow the judgments of the CCC, which, as we saw earlier, was the review body for films distributed in Italian cinemas. Moreover, the Encyclical *Miranda prorsus* (September 1957) appealed to spectators, and to cinema critics and managers of movie theaters, to choose only the films approved by the center.<sup>30</sup> These appeals show how the Church’s control over cinema was limited to audiences and their viewing experiences. The desire for greater influence was undoubtedly a factor in the decision to invest heavily in small-gauge cinema,<sup>31</sup> which, thanks to the monopoly on both the ‘reduction’ process and distribution by San Paolo Film (the company managed by the Opera di San Paolo), allowed the Church to extend its control to all the various stages of the filmmaking process.



While parish cinemas often ignored the directives on screening films deemed unsuitable for audiences, small-gauge cinemas could not bypass the directives of the CCC, since 16mm films were only distributed by San Paolo Film.

### **Abandoning Production**

Third, the second half of the 1950s saw the abandonment of the film production project. After the Second World War, the Catholic world launched various production projects. Aldo Bernardini talks about a “staggering quantity of short, mid-length and feature-length films, produced by various small companies, which to varying degrees were inspired by religion.”<sup>32</sup> The most well known of the small production companies were Orbis Film, Universalia and the aforementioned San Paolo Film. Their success, however, was short lived. On the one hand, the economic risk of production projects seemed too high, as was seen at the end of the thirties with *Abuna Messias* (Alessandrini, 1939),<sup>33</sup> and on the other, there was widespread intolerance towards the compromises required to guarantee the economic success of a film. As the director of the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* (Experimental Center of Cinema) at the end of the 1950s, and linked to the CCC, Michele Lacalamita articulated his insightful concerns.<sup>34</sup> Writing in *Bianco e Nero*, the then-leading Italian cinema magazine, Lacalamita expressed his extremely severe judgment on the production activities of the Catholic production companies. He accused the companies of adopting “the most deleterious tricks,” such as the use of stars, the lack of scruples in choosing subjects and the excessive wealth of technical and advertising means, to ensure the success of its films. Furthermore, Lacalamita stigmatized such practices and judged them inappropriate for communicating Christian values.<sup>35</sup> In the same article, which was subsequently published as a pamphlet,<sup>36</sup> Lacalamita stressed the need to exercise a direct influence “on the cultural, aesthetic and moral criteria of the creation, and on the economy of the production.”<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, this statement clearly demonstrates the chosen direction of the Catholic world, in that it used the paradigm of cinema as ‘means.’ While on the other hand, it shows how Catholics also recognized the need to engage with the cultural industry, especially if they wanted to intervene directly in the planning and production of media products, and not just in the final stage of the process. This call was followed by various institutions, beginning with the Catholic University of Sacred Heart in Milan, which systematically, from 1961 onwards, began courses on the means of communication to train new professionals and new managers for the Italian cultural industry.<sup>38</sup>

### **The CCC and the New Cultural Line of the Catholic World**

The clearest examples of unbalanced cultural initiatives in the Catholic world to reduce cinema as a paradigm to a mere tool can be found in the assessments of the CCC. Over the years, the assessments expressed by the CCC reflect oscillating changes that reveal a complex process of negotiation

between the two conflicting views on cinema in the Catholic world. Between the 1950s and 1960s in particular, the growth in the percentage of films that audiences were denied highlights the progressive dominance of the pedagogic model that saw cinema as simply as a teaching tool and not as something valuable in its own right. The speeches on the “ideal film” and the Second Vatican Council managed to slow down this tendency (as is evident in a decline in the films to be excluded or to be viewed with reservation between 1956 and 1965) without, however, reversing it.

The negative judgments (“restricted,” “not to be seen,” “excluded”) were focused mainly on Italian and French films, while the position on Hollywood cinema appears on the whole to have been less critical. The worsening of the assessments made by the CCC on Italian cinema coincided with the gradual disappearance of mid-budget productions with contents and ideas suitable for the general public, which critics and commentators at the time defined as “average films.”<sup>39</sup> In part, the increase in negative assessments and the subsequent drop in the number of Italian films that received the CCC seal of approval can be explained by the gap that opened in the second half of the 1960s between auteur cinema and popular productions, which often disappointed in terms of themes or styles deemed improper.<sup>40</sup>

Consequently, the idea of cinema as a ‘gift’ with a value in itself, even though it fueled some important initiatives such as film clubs, at least until their crisis in 1968,<sup>41</sup> was increasingly marginalized in the Catholic debate and policies on cinema and the media.

## A CONJUNCTURAL READING

Catholic policies on the media had an important repercussion on the processes that redefined the media system in Italy. Also, taking into account the plurality of factors that contributed to shaping the media scenario during these years (the spread of television, the overall economic situation and the actions of the state and political movements), the interventions of the Catholics on cinema and the media seem relevant in decreeing the crisis of cinema and in contributing to build a new media order.

If one considers the crisis of cinema from the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, the importance of the approach taken by the Catholic world clearly emerges. Proportionally, the majority of audiences who abandoned movie theaters during this period, in fact, lived in the central and southern regions and in the provinces, where television ownership was, at best, scarce. Likewise, such places were particularly sensitive and reactive to the Church’s dictates. Therefore, declining movie theater audiences in Italy did not reflect the appearance of television, but rather a combination of social, cultural and economic factors, which, undoubtedly, included the Church’s increasingly severe and sanctioning attitudes towards cinema. In general terms, it can be said that the stigma that was attributed to many aspects of film production accelerated the process of alienating key

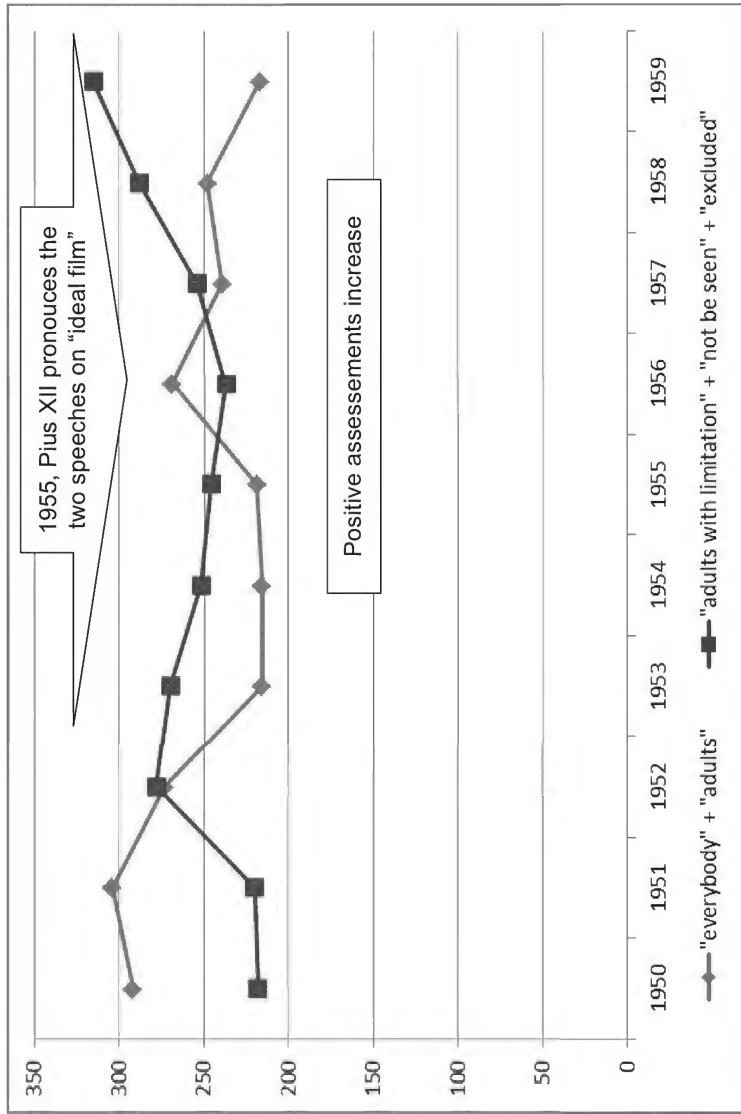


Figure 13.3 The moral advice (or recommendations) given by the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico* (1950–1959).<sup>42</sup>

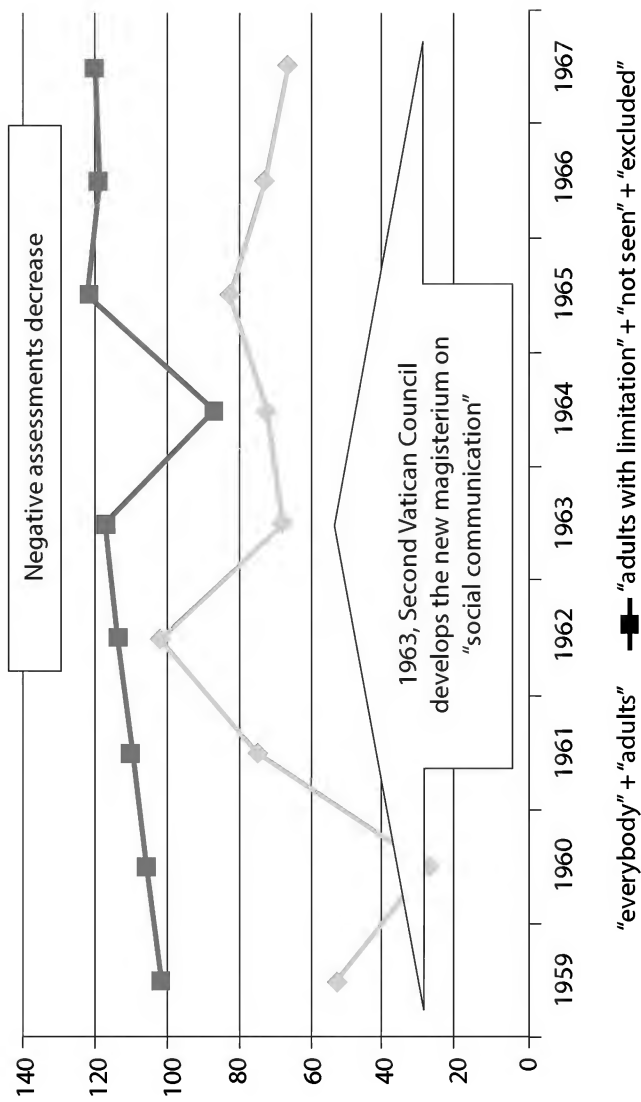


Figure 13.4 The moral advices (or recommendations) given by the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico* (1959–1967).<sup>43</sup>

segments of the public from cinemas (adult women and, as of the 1960s, the lower middle classes)<sup>44</sup> and pushed them towards the new forms of domestic entertainment, such as television, radio and vinyl records.

Another important factor is how the development of small-gauge theaters during the first half of the 1960s filled the gap left by commercial movie theaters, which had started to close in the beginning of the decade.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, this development represented a catalyst for an investment crisis in the medium. Consequently, the denial of the specialness of cinema (the format and the viewing space)<sup>46</sup> contributed to the process of an obliteration of the identity of cinema, which led towards its assimilation to television and other media. It is no accident that the Catholic teaching documents of the 1960s brought cinema, radio, television and the press together under the single heading 'instruments of social communication' and made them subject to scrutiny by a single pontifical commission for 'social communications.'<sup>47</sup>

This process was accompanied by a marked valorization of television, whose extraordinary potential was immediately recognized: "[T]elevision developed in Italy in the three fundamental functions of informing, educating and entertaining," stated the *Rivista del Cinematografo* in 1959, "just as the cinematic pursuit of reality at the service of truth and good was evolving into pseudo-real sketches and political indifference."<sup>48</sup> Television was also identified as a form of entertainment that allowed an escape from the oppression of the "masses and shared life [. . .] with an indubitable advantage for the reconstitution of a certain family climate."<sup>49</sup> The result was a cultural policy that was markedly different from the one applied to cinema: in the second half of the 1950s, for example, while the censorial activities of the CCC became increasingly severe, the *Centro Cattolico Televisivo* (Televisual Catholic Center, CCT) did not fail to highlight the quality of the programs broadcast by the *Radio Televisione Italiana* (Italian Radio and Television, RAI), nor did it fail to collaborate with it—even producing its own programs.<sup>50</sup>

The "ideal film," we read in Pius XII's second speech, "is a film that in perfect and harmonious form measures up to the original and essential demands of man himself."<sup>51</sup> The prerogatives that Pius XII wishes for cinema, to "fully reflect" the humanity of the spectator, seem to find an easier and more natural expression in television and its programs. Although, as we have already said, the change in the media landscape and consumption in Italy is the result of a multiplicity of factors, certainly the clarification and redefinition of the Catholic Church's cultural policies will be crucial in assisting cinema towards the media system's margins and in bringing television to the center of the Italian cultural industry and the national life.

## NOTES

1. The two speeches pronounced by Pope Pius XII in 1955 represent the more systematic formulation of the Catholic Church's teachings on cinema after the Encyclical *Vigilanti cura*, 1936. The first speech was made to a gathering of

- Italian film industry delegates on June 21. The second speech was delivered during a meeting of the International Union of Movie Theater Managers and Film Distributors on October 28. See: Viganò, Dario Edoardo. 2002. *Cinema e Chiesa. I documenti del Magistero*. Cantalupa: Effatà Editrice.
2. François Albera and Martin Lefebvre offer an excellent overview of the 'filmological' debate in the period after the Second World War. See Albera, François and Lefebvre, Martin, eds. 2009. a Filmologie de nouveau, *Cinémas. Revue d'études cinématographiques*, vol. 2–3.
  3. It should be noted that usually more than 60 percent of these cinemas worked less than sixty days per year. Data on movie theaters and cinema consumption are published every year by the *Società Italiana Autori ed Editori* (Authors and Publisher Italian Association, SIAE) in *Lo spettacolo in Italia* [The Spectacle in Italy]. For a history of parish theaters in Italy between the 1930s and the 1960s, see Fanchi, Mariagrazia. 2006. "Non censurare ma educare! L'esercizio cinematografico cattolico e il suo progetto culturale e sociale," in Eugeni Ruggero and Dario Edoardo Viganò, eds., *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*. Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 103–113.
  4. See: Casetti, Francesco and Mosconi, Elena, eds. 2006. *Spettatori italiani. Riti e ambienti del consumo cinematografico (1900–1950)*. Rome: Carocci.
  5. Bizzarri, Nino. 1976. "Cattolici e cinema nell'Italia fascista." *Quaderno informativo. Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema*, 71: 327–334.
  6. Considering that, in 1934, when the parish cinemas were registered for the first time, there were 476 'oratory cinemas' (SIAE. 1937. *Lo spettacolo in Italia. Annuario Statistico. Anno 1936*. Rome: Società Italiana degli Autori ed Editori, SIAE). If one looks at the data for the end of the decade, parish cinemas account for 1 percent: even taking into account that the price of a ticket was considerably lower than the price of commercial cinemas, the estimate of 2000 cinemas seems unlikely (Fanchi. 2006. "Non censurare ma educare!").
  7. For the state of the cinema industry after the Second World War, see Quaglietti, Lorenzo. 1974. "Il cinema italiano del dopoguerra. Leggi, produzione, distribuzione, esercizio." *Quaderno informativo. Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema*, 58.
  8. SIAE. 1967. *Lo spettacolo in Italia. Annuario Statistico. Anno 1966*. Rome: SIAE.
  9. In 1963, for the first time, the Società Italiana Autori ed Editori (SIAE) began to register parish cinemas systematically. Before that date, data on Catholic movie theaters was published more sporadically. See SIAE. 1964. *Lo spettacolo in Italia. Annuario Statistico. Anno 1963*. Rome: SIAE.
  10. SIAE. 1967. *Lo spettacolo in Italia. Annuario Statistico. Anno 1966*. Rome: SIAE.
  11. In 1971 in Italy, there were 1756 cinemas projecting 16mm films; 1523 of them were Catholic cinemas and 1223 of the whole figure were located in Northern Italy. See SIAE. 1972. *Lo spettacolo in Italia. Annuario Statistico. Anno 1971*. Rome: SIAE.
  12. Viganò, Dario Edoardo. 1997. *Un cinema ogni campanile. Chiesa e cinema nella diocesi di Milano*. Milan: Il Castoro.
  13. SIAE. 1961. *Lo spettacolo in Italia. Annuario Statistico. Anno 1960*. Rome: SIAE.
  14. Fanchi, Mariagrazia. 2008. "Das italienische Filmpublikum der 1960er Jahre" in Thomas Koebner and Irmbert Schenk, eds. *Das goldene Zeitalter des italienischen Films*. Munich: edition text+Kritik: 50–63; Fanchi, Mariagrazia. 2010. "Tra donne sole. Cinema, Cultural Consumption and the Female Condition in Post-war Italy." in Irmbert Schenk, Margrit Tröhler and Yvonne Zimmermann, eds. *Film-Kino-Zuschauer: Filmrezeption. Film-Cinema-Spectator: Film Reception*. Marburg: Schüren: 305–318.
  15. De Berti, Raffaele and Locatelli, Massimo, eds. 2008. *Figure della modernità (1900–1940)*. Pisa: Edizione EDS.

16. In 1938, an investigation by *Cinema*, the main critical film studies magazine of the period, revealed that out of the 4900 cinemas in Italy, 1300 did not have sound equipment (see Antonioni, Michelangelo and Puccini, Gianni. 1940. "Due lustri di sonoro," *Cinema*, 108: 437–440). A considerable number of these were Catholic cinemas. See Quargnolo, Mario. 1986. *La parola ripudiata. L'incredibile storia dei film stranieri in Italia nei primi anni del sonoro*. Gemona: La Cineteca del Friuli, 18.
17. An. 1941. "(Il) cinema educativo." *Eco degli Oratori*, 7–8: 3.
18. An. 1932. "Radiofonia. Esperimenti di televisione alla mostra della radio." *Rivista del Cinematografo*, 8: 213.
19. Morandi, Guglielmo. 1949. "La televisione è in ritardo." *Rivista del Cinematografo*, 6: 23.
20. After 1950, the *Rivista del cinematografo* edited several articles about the differences between cinema and television, which aimed to demonstrate the possible coexistence of the two media. Perrini, Alberto. 1950. "Cinema e televisione." *Rivista del Cinematografo*, 1: 11–12; Fabbri, Daniele. 1952. "Cinema e televisione. I film del cinema e della televisione sono fratelli, ma non gemelli." *Rivista del Cinematografo*, 2: 13–14; Perrini, Alberto. 1953. "Cinema e televisione sono due cose diverse." *Rivista del Cinematografo*, 4: 12–13; Rondi, GianLuigi. 1953. "Cinema e Televisione. Lotta all'ultimo sangue?" *Rivista del Cinematografo*, 12: 6. For a reconstruction of the history of the magazine and its cultural policy, see Mosconi, Elena, ed. 2008. *Nero su Bianco. Le politiche per il cinema negli ottant'anni della Rivista del cinematografo*. Rome: Edizioni Fondazione Ente dello Spettacolo.
21. Argentieri, Mino. 1974. *La censura nel cinema italiano*. Rome: Editori Riuniti.
22. Taking into account the CCC's positive attitude towards Fascist film productions, as opposed to the strict censorship applied to neorealistic movies. Brunetta, Gian Piero. 1993. *Storia del cinema italiano. Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico. 1945–1959*. Rome: Editori Riuniti.
23. Civaldi, Luigi. 1940. *Il cinema di fronte alla morale*. Rome: CCC.
24. In the 1910s, the standard censorship criteria are mostly unknown; from an attentive analysis of *Rivista di letture*, however, we can detect the existence of a different degree of movies' 'acceptability.' See Viganò. 1997. *Un cinema ogni campanile*: 23–24.
25. Assessing and selecting criteria were defined in 1924, when the Catholic judgments began to be published in the *Rivista di letture*. See Muscolino, Marco. 2006. "La 'Rivista del cinematografo.' Dalla nascita al 1968." in Ruggero Eugeni and Dario Edoardo Viganò, eds. *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*. Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo: 181–196. Regarding CCC policies between the 1940s and 1950s, see Fantina, Livio. 2004. "I giudizi del CCC." in Luciano De Giusti, ed. *Storia del cinema italiano. 1949–1953. Vol. VIII*. Venice: Marsilio: 80–92.
26. For further reading on the peculiar position that the Italian left assumed on women and cinema, see Cardone, Lucia. 2009. *'Noi Donne' e il cinema. Dalle illusioni a Zavattini (1944–1954)*. Pisa: Edizioni ETS.
27. For an analysis of the phenomenon, see Fanchi. 2010. *'Tra donne sole.'*
28. *Primavera's* history was analyzed by Ilaria Mattioni. 2007. "Editoria periodica salesiana ed educazione femminile nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra. Il caso di *Primavera*. *Rivista per giovinette* (1950–1979)." *History of Education & Children's Literature*, II-2: 291–312). The presence of references to cinema and the media in the magazine is reconstructed in Fanchi, Mariagrazia. 2011. "A ben vedere. Cinema e media in *Primavera*. *Rivista per giovinette*," in Lucia Cardone and Sara Filippelli, eds. *Cinema e scritture femminili. Letterate italiane fra la pagina e lo schermo*. Rome: Trerefusi, 166–179.

29. Fanchi, Mariagrazia. 2012. "Pastore di Anime. Monde catholique et médias des années Cinquante aux années Soixante." in Anna Bertolli, Andrea Mariani and Martina Panelli, eds. *Il cinema si impara? Can we learn cinema?* Udine: Film Forum, 59–65.
30. Baragli, Enrico. 1958. *Cinema cattolico. Documenti della Santa Sede sul cinema*. Rome: Edizioni la Civiltà Cattolica, 190–230.
31. The wide assortment of movies, along with cheaper tickets (in the 1960s, 16mm cinema tickets cost up to 30 percent less than those of a standard cinema), contributes to the success of small-gauge cinemas. This success was so important that between 1960 and 1965, we witness the growth of Catholic 16mm cinemas from 723 to 1669, as the graphic shows. (SIAE. 1961. *Lo spettacolo in Italia. Annuario Statistico. Anno 1960*. Rome: SIAE. 1966. *Lo spettacolo in Italia. Annuario Statistico. Anno 1965*. Rome: SIAE).
32. Bernardini, Aldo. 2006. "Un cinema "cattolico?" in Ruggero Eugeni and Dario Edoardo Viganò, eds. *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*, 287.
33. A direct and sorrowful account of the economic difficulties that the San Paolo company had to face following a series of costly and ruinous production initiatives can be found in Luigina, Borrano, 2009. *Le Figlie di San Paolo e il cinema. Dal 1947 al 1970. Memorie e documenti*. Rome: Figlie di San Paolo. Thanks to Sabrina Negri for mentioning the source.
34. From the 1930s onwards, the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* was the most important school of cinema in Italy. See, especially Baldi, Alfredo and Celli, Silvio, eds. 2010. *L'Università del cinema. I primi anni del CSC. Bianco e Nero*, 566.
35. Lacalamita, Michele. 1957. "Chiesa, cattolici e cinema," *Bianco e Nero*, 12: 1–17.
36. Lacalamita, Michele. 1958. *Chiesa, cattolici e cinema*. Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo,
37. Ivi, 14.
38. The history of the *Scuola di Specializzazione in Comunicazioni Sociali* of the *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore* of Milan and its role in defining the structure of the Italian media system is currently the subject of a two-year research project directed by Ruggero Eugeni.
39. Corsi, Barbara. 2001. *Con qualche dollaro in meno. Storia economica del cinema italiano*. Rome: Editori Riuniti.
40. See Spinazzola, Vittorio. 1985. *Cinema e pubblico. Lo spettacolo filmico in Italia. 1945–1965*. Rome: Bulzoni Editore.
41. 1968 saw a dramatic split within Catholic film clubs that soon led to the end of a movement that, though small, was enormously relevant for post-war Italian culture. Regarding the increasing importance and eventually the crisis of Catholic film clubs, see Brunetta, GianPiero. 1993. *Storia del cinema italiano*, and Brunetta, GianPiero. 1993. *Storia del cinema italiano. Dal miracolo economico agli anni Novanta. 1960–1993*. Rome: Editori Riuniti. For more details on film clubs in the middle of the 1960s, see Rositi, Franco. 1966. "I cineclub in Italia. Ricerca con referendum postale (aprile-giugno 1965)." *IKON. Cinema, televisione, iconografia*, XVI-57: 29–89.
42. Data is drawn from "Segnalazioni cinematografiche" published by CCC in *Rivista del Cinematografo*. The graphic includes all recommendations expressed by CCC every year.
43. The data in this graph comes from "Segnalazioni cinematografiche"; it only refers to recommendations concerning Italian movies.
44. Fanchi. 2008. "Das italienische Filmpublikum der 1960er Jahre."
45. See SIAE. 1961. *Lo spettacolo in Italia. Annuario Statistico. Anno 1960*. Quaglietti, Lorenzo. 1980. *Storia economico-politica del cinema italiano. 1945–1980*. Rome: Editori Riuniti.



46. 16mm movies were often shown in 'alternative' spaces like oratories.
47. See encyclical 'Inter Mirifica' in Viganò, Dario. 2002. *Cinema e Chiesa. I documenti del Magistero*, 126–131. See also Convents, Guido. 2001. "I cattolici e il cinema." in GianPiero Brunetta, ed. *Storia del cinema mondiale. Teorie, strumenti, memorie*. Torino: Einaudi: 485–517.
48. First part of the quote comes from Lacalamica, Michele. 1959. "Cinema, televisione e costume." *Rivista del Cinematografo*, 2: 47. It is interesting to note that the same objection was made by leftist film critics to so-called "neorealismo rosa" (Noto, Paolo and Pitassio, Francesco. 2010. *Il cinema neorealista*. Bologna: Archetipo). Second from Filizzola, Renato. 1954. "Questa nostra televisione." *Rivista del Cinematografo*, 11: 9.
49. An. 1957. (La) televisione non è 'il cinema in casa,' *Rivista del Cinematografo*, 3: 83–84.
50. The line taken by the *Centro Cattolico Televisivo* (Televisual Center, CCT) is analyzed and reconstructed in Fanchi, Mariagrazia. 2012. 'Pastore di Anime. Monde catholique et médias des années Cinquante aux années Soixante.'
51. See *Second speech on Ideal Film* in Viganò, Dario. 2002. *Cinema e Chiesa. I documenti del Magistero*, 91.

Part V

# Exhibition and Cinema-Going Experiences

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# 14 Separating the Sheep from the Goats

## Gendering Space in the Cinema Auditorium in Rucphen (1929)

*Thunnis van Oort*

The topography of the cinema as a venue is not a theme often visited in film historiography, notwithstanding the increasing significance attached to ‘spatiality’ in social film history.<sup>1</sup> Studies that analyze the movie theater as a marker of social difference often focus on class (for instance, in relation to seating arrangements) and ethnicity (such as racial segregation integrated into the architecture of cinemas, as in the Jim Crow Southern United States).<sup>2</sup> The question of gender with regard to the spatial configuration inside the cinema theater has attracted little research interest.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it is difficult to investigate given that the empirical evidence on historical audience composition is problematic: seating arrangements leave hardly traces.<sup>4</sup> However, an eccentric twist in events can occasionally challenge cultural assumptions that have been previously taken for granted but that are confusing for a present-day reading. This chapter examines an incident in the peripheral Dutch municipality of Rucphen that raises questions about the limits of Catholic control over cinema audiences, with specific regard to the regulation of gender relations inside the cinema theater itself.

Gender was indeed a factor in the attempt to discipline cinema audiences through the demarcation of the physical space within theaters, as was the case in the rural municipality of Rucphen, situated in the Catholic South of the Netherlands. In 1928, the village council made the national newspapers with its decree of separation, which required aisles of at least 85 centimeters in width between the separate seating sections for male and female audience members in the local Palace Cinema. This measure generated outrage in national liberal and Socialist newspapers, and was regarded as an excess typical of the ‘backward’ Catholic South.<sup>5</sup> However, the Rucphen case did remain an extraordinary exception. Even though many institutions in the daily life of Dutch Catholics were subject to gender segregation, such as education, sports, club life and religious life, the separation of the sexes in the cinema was not considered a viable option by Dutch Catholic policymakers (see also Chapter 8). Although a wide variety of measures were taken by Catholic authorities to discipline moviegoing audiences (such as censorship and age restrictions to exclude children), the separating of the ‘sheep and the goats’ was evidently considered

to be a bridge too far. This case illustrates that the controlling of the Catholic cinema audiences was not merely a top-down strategy, but a more complex exploration of, and negotiation with, what was acceptable to the rank-and-file Catholic citizen.

The aim of this chapter is not to propose a definite answer to the question of why gender segregation was not implemented in cinemas in the Catholic South. Instead, it recognizes that to ask why something did *not* happen in the past is a variation on counterfactual history, with all the associated risks (and delights) of speculative historiography. Instead, I do want to draw attention to the paradox that Catholic anxieties about commercial entertainment centered very much on sexuality and gender relations. Therefore, I will look at how the Catholic policies aimed at controlling the moviegoing experience through the physical separation of the sexes were not successfully implemented, or even seriously discussed, even though gender segregation was an important fact in many aspects of Catholic life. I will demonstrate this apparent contradiction by placing the anomalous Rucphen case in the context of the policies developed by Dutch Catholics during the 1910s and 1920s, which were intended to regulate cinema-going.

The female cinema audience is a much-discussed topic in media history, and is too complex to even summarize here.<sup>6</sup> However, it is important for this chapter to keep in mind that the trend in the literature discussing female audiences during the silent era interprets the cinema as a new public arena for women, or at least a contested space where new gender relations were being formulated. This hypothesis is constructed from two main perspectives: film spectatorship as is implied by films as texts, and the social history of audiences. The former is exemplified by Miriam Hanson's landmark work on female film spectatorship as seen in conjunction with the transformation of the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> The latter perspective was pioneered by social historian Kathy Peiss in her study on early twentieth-century New York, showing how commercial entertainment such as the cinema created new socially and gender heterogeneous arenas, offering opportunities to redefine social, gender and sexual relations.<sup>8</sup> This chapter is situated in the latter tradition, adding a specific religious-historical perspective. Furthermore, the historiography on female film audiences is traditionally focused on the metropolitan experience of moviegoing. Robert Allen has noted how, in provincial North Carolina, religion was a crucial factor differentiating the rural experiences of moviegoing from those in the big city.<sup>9</sup> The Rucphen case corroborates Allen's argument by suggesting a variety of moviegoing experiences available for Catholic women and men in the provincial Netherlands.

This chapter will offer an overview of the development of Dutch Catholic policies regarding film exhibition and the establishment of a censorship apparatus, which turned out to be the most tangible accomplishment of Catholic film policy. This is followed by an exposition of the Rucphen case, put into context by a discussion of gender segregation in Dutch Catholic social and cultural life.

**CATHOLICS AND CINEMA IN THE NETHERLANDS**

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, approximately 60 percent of Dutch inhabitants were Protestant and about 38 percent Catholic. Most Catholics lived in the South.<sup>10</sup> The southern provinces Brabant and Limburg were both predominantly Catholic. From the second half of the nineteenth century, the Catholic minority gradually gained confidence and political influence. Catholics formed the largest religious minority in a country where the Dutch Reformed Church was prevalent, and where Protestants traditionally held the positions of power and prominence. Since the last quarter of the century, both religious blocs (in addition to two smaller and later developing Socialist and liberal movements) were increasingly organized into what later came to be called 'pillars.' By the 1920s, these had developed into vast social networks comprising schools, political parties, media infrastructures such as newspapers and broadcasting corporations, unions, leisure organizations, social care institutions, housing associations, etc., in an entangled mix of private and state-sponsored initiatives.

The Catholic movement increasingly permeated the daily life of the faithful, far beyond the confines of the church walls.<sup>11</sup> The clergy played an important part in this process as cultural intermediaries. Priests supervised the lives of their flock by regular house visits. In 1916, the Limburg diocese advised its pastors to make card catalogs in order to follow parishioners through the stages of their lives.<sup>12</sup> In the southern provinces, Catholic clergy played an influential part in the public life, via the pulpit, and as official board members or, more often, 'spiritual advisors' to a wide variety of organizations and institutions. They also bore influence informally and unofficially, as members of the Catholic elites of politicians, entrepreneurs, intellectuals and other dignitaries.

Notwithstanding the broad social and political diversity among Catholic authority figures and opinion leaders, most were united by a general sense of crisis caused by the perceived dangers of modernity. The world was changing quickly, and secularization was a vital concern. "The modern individual feels completely autonomous," as the popular Limburg chaplain Henri Poels voiced his concern in 1921 over man's apparent increasing independence from Church and God.<sup>13</sup> This is also evident elsewhere in Europe, where Catholic leaders called for a 'rechristianization' of society. Commercial entertainment was identified as an arena where this rechristening 'offensive' should be directed, especially since confessional influence appeared to be waning in that area. During the late nineteenth century, a dense network of private and semi-public Catholic social activities had sprung up in the leisure domain. A vibrant club life comprising sports, theater, musical and other social clubs developed. This process was largely subject to Catholic clerical supervision, and was centrally managed by the dioceses. However, the spectacular surge in commercial entertainment since the 1910s, which, of course, included the moving pictures, proved to be very hard to control.

While the Protestant clergy kept aloof, entirely condemning modern entertainment such as the cinema, Catholics attempted to control and appropriate, and even 'improve,' this phenomenon. In fact, they also recognized the cinema's potential for 'good.' Likewise, the popularity of the movies among Catholics was a given fact authorities simply had to address. During the years before the Second World War, an uncoordinated assortment of attempts was made to create a Catholic film culture, in production, distribution and exhibition. These attempts, however, had very limited success. Catholic film production remained a small niche lacking any significant impact. In fact, it consisted of artistic avant-garde experiments by young intellectuals, or political and religious propaganda, neither of which genuinely appealed to large audiences.<sup>14</sup> Film distributors catering for Catholic audiences did exist, but they were a marginal force in the Dutch film industry.

Around 1910, fixed-location cinemas began to emerge in provincial towns in the Catholic South, which included several local initiatives to operate Catholic cinemas.<sup>15</sup> Mainly, these were local associations acting out of mixed motives: on the one hand, opportunism to make a quick buck from the sudden boom in the popularity of cinema-going, and, on the other hand, a desire to contain the suspected dangers of cinema-going, especially to the children and young adults. Although the sources on the characteristics of these cinemas—such as programming, prices, audiences and business structure—are very scarce, it is clear that their life span was limited. Some, however, were transformed into the regular commercial cinemas. Those few cinemas retaining their Catholic identity appear to have specialized in children and young audiences.

During the First World War, in which the Netherlands remained neutral, the popularity of cinema-going continued to rise. Growing concerns about the alleged harmful effects of moviegoing led to local measures aimed at controlling the cinema. In an effort to create legislation, the national government initiated an inquiry into the dangers of the cinema. This resulted in increased government control on moviegoing, which in turn was resisted by an improved level of organization in the distribution and exhibition branches of the film industry. If reorganization helped the industry survive the proliferating municipal measures, such as rising entertainment taxes, censorship laws and age restrictions, it was a different story for Catholic cinemas, which found it difficult to survive this new polarized climate.

In the southern town of Venlo in 1921, the Catholic municipal authorities came into a head-on conflict with the national *Nederlandsche Bioscoopbond* (Netherlands Cinema Alliance, NBB). Reacting to the tax benefits and additional assistance awarded to a cinema run by a local Catholic union, the NBB wanted to protect the interests of the 'regular' commercial cinemas in Venlo. For over a year, all cinemas were closed in Venlo because the united distributors cut off the film supply. The exhibitors were paid out of a strike fund until the municipal authorities caved in. The outcome of

this local conflict determined the relationship between the cinema industry and Catholics during the rest of the decade. The powerful NBB successfully discouraged cinema exhibitors from openly associating with Catholicism. After the 'Venlo' clash, Catholic cinemas basically ceased to exist. It was only later, during the 1930s, that explicitly Catholic cinema exhibition reappeared. This time, however, it was limited to incidental 16mm projection, and only to the small towns and villages where regular exhibition was absent; in other words: where Catholic cinemas did not compete commercially with regular cinema exhibition.

Besides the high level of organization of the cinema distribution and exhibition industry, one of the reasons that Catholic cinema exhibition failed in the Netherlands was its lack of supra-local coordination or support. There was little inclination among the clergy to actively support or stimulate interest in a 'suspect' activity such as cinema-going. The rare initiatives taken by Catholic organizations in the area of cinema distribution or exhibition were, in fact, condoned rather than welcomed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. However, in itself, this clerical attitude towards cinema is an insufficient explanation, especially since Catholic cinemas flourished in neighboring Belgium (see Chapter 15). Comparative research would be required for a more satisfactory answer to the question why, contrary to Belgium, Catholic cinemas did not succeed in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, we should take into account that the film markets in the neighboring countries differed greatly. While Belgium was counted among the highest number of moviegoers per inhabitant in continental Europe, the Netherlands was counted among the lowest.<sup>16</sup>

After the failure of Catholic exhibition became evident during the early 1920s, policymakers directed their efforts towards controlling and limiting the content of the films screened through censorship measures. Municipal censorship boards had been in place from 1912 onwards in numerous Dutch cities and towns, both Catholic and Protestant, or mixed. Unlike the failing Catholic exhibition initiatives, attempts to coordinate censorship beyond a local level did receive support from Catholic authorities. In 1915, the biweekly publication of a periodical called *Tooneel en Bioscoop* (*Theatre and Cinema*) started. In fact, it contained a list of films and plays judged either fit for Catholic audiences or unfit—or fit only on the condition that certain indicated scenes were cut. *Tooneel en Bioscoop* was edited and published in the prestigious seminary in Rolduc. The journal was seen by a growing number of Catholic city councils as a legal register determining which films were permitted for screening in the local cinemas. The acceptance of this periodical by numerous municipalities laid the groundwork for a regional collaboration with regard to film censorship.

A state committee installed in 1918 recommended the passage of a national cinema act. However, it took ten years before any such legislation was put in place. The mayors of several important Catholic cities in



the south grew tired of waiting. So, in 1923, and in close consultation with the first Catholic prime minister of the Netherlands, Charles Ruys de Beerenbrouck, they founded the *Vereeniging van Noord-Brabantsche en Limburgsche gemeenten ter gemeenschappelijke filmkeuring* (Joint Southern Film Censorship Association, hereafter called Censorship Association). In reality, the association was a club run by mayors that coordinated the reviewing, censoring and banning of films in the Catholic South. City councils could vote for their city to become a member of the association, thereby subjecting the cinemas in their community to the verdicts of the Censorship Association's appointed censor. Having started out with eighteen members, the association expanded to thirty-seven cities and towns in 1939, which included the majority of communities in the Catholic South of the Netherlands with a theater for permanent cinema exhibition. In March 1928, national legislation finally came into effect, regulating the relationship between government and cinema exhibition with a nationally uniform licensing system. A national board of review was instated. Local review councils were charged with supervising the observance of the legislation by exhibitors. In the eyes of Catholic authorities in the south, however, a national board of review that also included non-Catholics could not guarantee specifically Catholic moral standards. So, Prime Minister Ruys de Beerenbrouck made certain that the 1928 Cinema Act was provided with a loophole allowing the Censorship Association to remain in operation in addition to the national censorship procedure. This double censorship in the Catholic South remained in place until 1967.

In summarizing this section on Catholics and cinema in the Netherlands, it is important to note that the measures taken by Catholic policymakers focused on centralized censorship regulations, after the failure of Catholic film production, distribution and exhibition on local and national levels. In general, the Catholic press, functioning under diocesan supervision, loyally followed the judgments of the censors. Although, from time to time, local authorities were dismayed by the censor's approval of a particular film, the discord stayed out of the public arena, as was usually the case. A more independent Catholic film criticism did, however, develop during the 1930s, but by then the contours of a Catholic film culture had been already formed.<sup>17</sup> In comparison to the commercial cinema infrastructure that had consolidated over several decades, the more positive approach of attaining the 'good' Catholic film remained insignificant. Instead of an appropriation of the medium, Catholic authorities had essentially resorted to regulating distribution by censorship. Apart from this central censorship apparatus, municipal authorities had several additional means of regulating moviegoing, such as raising entertainment taxes and placing a minimum age restriction on audiences. Interventions by authorities in the architecture of the theater itself, however, were limited to safety regulations, such as emergency exits and the projectionist's booth.

## THE RUCPHEN ANOMALY

What happened in Rucphen? Or, to be more precise, in the hamlet of St. Willebrord within the municipality of Rucphen, which was a peripheral agrarian zone in the west of Brabant. Mr. Daniël Luijkx ran a bar, called *De Eendracht* (Concord), at Dorpsstraat 44. In February 1928, Luijkx petitioned the mayor for a permit to open his *Paleis Bioscoop* (Palace cinema). Judging from a surviving low-resolution photo of the hall (not reproduced here), it was a far from palatial backroom with movable chairs, which was decorated with a large beer advertisement.<sup>18</sup> Luijkx was granted a permit for cinema exhibition only on the condition that men and women were seated separately.<sup>19</sup> He refused to comply, and after two warnings, his permit was revoked. When Luijkx's appeal to this decision was denied by higher provincial authorities, the national press heard of the affair, presumably tipped off by the NBB, the national interest group for film distributors and exhibitors. Both the liberal and Socialist papers sharply criticized the judgment of local and provincial authorities as prime examples of the alleged 'backwardness' of the Catholic South.

The NBB eagerly added fuel to the fire, hoping to embarrass the Catholic film action as a whole, by pointing out the extraordinary situation in Rucphen. The reason for this was the NBB's heated campaign against the



Figure 14.1 View of the Dorpsstraat in St. Willebrord. On the right Luykx's cinema, in later years renamed Luma (after *Luykx* and his wife *Marijnissen*). Date and photographer: unknown, circa 1950.

Source: A.G. de Bruijn/Regionaal Archief West-Brabant.

Catholic Censorship Association's continued insistence to enforce Catholic censorship, even after a national board of review had been installed. The NBB even circulated a satirical song about the affair:

Victory Starts in Rucphen

Broken a lance for the virtuous/Mayor and his Aldermen  
 In the chaste town of Rucphen/They're a beacon in a sea of sin  
 For in the cinema auditorium/They divide the shy sheep from the goats  
 The men left and the women right/Each in their own pen  
 Imagine! Girls, boys/Sitting side by side just like that!  
 That is not fit for a decent/Honest, good society.  
 The film star kisses her film hero/What an intense stimulus  
 Well, chances are /The audience repeats it  
 Therefore: sheep from goats/Just like chickens in a run  
 When Mayor and Aldermen were still kissing/The cinema did not yet exist  
 Youth of Rucphen! It can't be changed/It was done for your wellbeing  
 Just wait until the film is over/And find comfort under the moon  
 Decent Mayor and Aldermen of Rucphen/How admirable was  
 your decision  
 But we have another suggestion/Leave the lights on during the film<sup>20</sup>

After Daniël Luykx's appeal was denied, his permit was revoked. In addition, he was fined 50 Dutch guilders for using violence against a member of the municipal cinema board. His brother took over the cinema and was successful in applying for a permit. Johannes complied with the strict gender segregation and censorship regulations, and this generated goodwill among the local authorities. In the summer of 1935, Johannes Luykx successfully requested that the village council revoke the gender separation decree.<sup>21</sup>

The conflict between Daniël Luijkx and the authorities was rooted in an earlier animosity, and should also be seen within the context of the harsh socio-economic conditions in the region. First of all, Luijkx was involved in an apparent power struggle with the local parish priest, Leo van Mierlo. The brass band *De Harmonie* (Harmony), under clerical supervision, had split up in 1924, and a competing brass band, mockingly dubbed *Eendracht* (Concord), was started. The new band practiced in Luijkx's bar.<sup>22</sup> Luijkx was also involved in dividing the two rivaling factions of the horticultural association led by Father Van Mierlo. The priest wielded not only informal power in the local community, but also held a more formal position, as chairman of the cinema board, to influence the municipal policy. In fact, it was Van Mierlo who had suggested the separation of the sexes in the auditorium of the *Paleis Bioscoop*. So, the personal antagonism between Luijkx and Van Mierlo was a factor in the realization of this remarkable measure. Relations between authorities and the *Paleis Bioscoop* improved after Daniël Luykx passed the management of the cinema to his brother Johannes in 1929. Father Van Mierlo stepped down from the cinema committee in December 1930.

However, this personal hostility should be viewed within the broader perspective of general (class) relations between the population of St. Willebrord and their authorities. The barren, sandy soils housed an impoverished community. Inhabitants scraped together meager livelihoods legitimately as basket makers or carpenters and, less legitimately, as smugglers and poachers. Historically, the region was notorious for its high crime statistics.<sup>23</sup> This is illustrated by a caption, taken from the catalog of a national exhibition of traditional costumes held in 1898 (see Figure 14.2), three decades earlier, describing St. Willebrord inhabitants dressed according to local custom:

St. Willebrord is situated in a previously disputed territory. Genuine supervision was lacking, making it a last resort for all kinds of riff-raff, living as half savages. Recently, a Catholic priest has succeeded somewhat in civilizing the population. The men are chicken merchants during the day and smugglers at night, the women and children sell baskets and brooms, and beg.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 14.2 Picture of St. Willebrord girl in traditional costume, exhibition catalog *Nationale Kleederdrachten van Harer Majesteits onderdanen* (1898). Photographer: H.W.J. Bickhoff.

Source: Nederlands Openluchtmuseum Arnhem.

In 1929, when provincial authorities requested a reason for the peculiar practice of separating men and women in the cinema auditorium, the mayor produced a list of social evils infesting the area, illustrating the low ‘moral standards’ of the citizens in his care:

Of the 67 marriages solemnized between 1919–1927, 25 were without early childbirths, four with a child already born before marriage and 38 with a child conceived before contracting the marriage. Lately there are many abortions of pregnancies, and we suspect the number is increasing. Over two years’ time six divorces occurred among 2000 inhabitants.<sup>25</sup>

It is revealing that the mayor considered it relevant to mention the social and moral circumstances that formed the background of the separation of the sexes in the *Paleis Bioscoop*. In addition, a series of specific incidents and witness reports were included, with the purpose of demonstrating the moral dangers looming in Luijkx’s establishment. Examples included the frequent violent fights that had taken place in the cinema, during which two people had been stabbed with knives and windows had been broken. A local police officer witnessed on April 2, 1929, that “boys and girls aged fifteen and sixteen did not watch any part of the show and were making out the entire evening. Some of them took their girl on their lap to unleash their passions.”<sup>26</sup> The *Paleis Bioscoop* certainly does not appear to have been a decent middle-class movie ‘palace.’ Instead, it was a place where desperate measures were deemed necessary by the authorities to establish order.

## THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

The hostile relations between Luijkx, Van Mierlo and the mayor can perhaps explain the separating of men and women in the *Paleis Bioscoop*; likewise, the tense class relations between the paternalistic authorities and the impoverished flock, who needed to be controlled and ‘civilized,’ offer some explanation. However, both explanations fail to explain why separating men from women in the theater happened in this isolated community, but was not considered an option by Catholic policymakers elsewhere in the Netherlands (or abroad, as is discussed later). Given that gender segregation was common practice for many other aspects of Catholic life, this case is all the more interesting.

In religious worship, male and female churchgoers often had their own separate seating areas.<sup>27</sup> In St. Willebrord’s neighboring village Etten, even the bicycle shed attached to the church was divided into a male and female space.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, males and females had their own houses and communities within their respective religious orders. Women were also restricted

from holding sacred offices in the Church. Given that the Church dominated many areas of social life, such as education, welfare, health care and leisure organizations, it was able to promote gender segregation, especially where the 'dangerous ages' of youth were concerned. Boys and girls went to separate schools and youth clubs. In fact, many clubs within an extensive network of leisure activities, including sports, music and theater, were often segregated by gender, or were simply open to 'men only.' With regard to sport, girls and women were not allowed to engage in 'masculine' sports such as soccer and cycling. In fact, sports clubs for female members developed later than the ones for men, and women were encouraged to practice indoor sports such as gymnastics.<sup>29</sup> Amateur theater groups were popular in the Catholic South, but for a long time, these were 'men only,' and male actors played the female roles. While at the end of the nineteenth century professional actresses were hesitantly allowed to play on stage, amateur actresses remained a taboo in the Catholic South.<sup>30</sup> In some cases, separate theater shows were performed for successively male and female audiences, up until the 1950s.<sup>31</sup>

The role of women in the Dutch Catholic world for many years remained an under-researched subject. Likewise, traditional Catholic historiography ignored women. Only in the last three decades is the idea of women being stereotyped as 'oppressed' or 'unemancipated' being revisited.<sup>32</sup> It is clear that laywomen played a part in public life. This is especially evident in the numerous women's organizations for female workers, farmers, working-class girls and so on. Therefore, women were in fact active in the much broader cultural offensive that Catholic policymakers and opinion leaders had been carrying out for decades in their efforts to 'rechristen' the population.

Still, Catholic women did not really participate in the efforts aimed at controlling and reforming the cinema, at least not from within Catholic institutions, nor in the diverse national organizations, or in the local boards of censorships in the cities and towns of the Catholic South. While no systematic research on this subject exists, my explorations of the Catholic South found that the local dignitaries who filled local censorship boards, compiled of civil servants, factory directors, police officers, school principals, etc., were exclusively men. Even when censors were recruited from fields such as the educational sector—where female professionals were common—anecdotal evidence suggests that only men were appointed—often school directors. Further comparative research would be needed to establish whether the absence of women was typically Dutch, typically Catholic or perhaps neither.

Clearly, women were allowed to attend the cinema, and they did. However, how often women relative to men, and whether girls or women visited the cinema with or without male accompaniment, is not systematically known, and certainly not for this period. A lot depended on the character of the specific cinema. For example, boys may have dominated attendance

at a cinema for younger audiences. Annette Kuhn has written about the different experiences of British cinema attendance from male and female perspectives, but in her interviews, religion is not thematized.<sup>33</sup> Contemporary press discourses might give us indications of female cinema attendance, but actual figures or statistical data are very hard, if not impossible, to come by, certainly for the earlier periods.<sup>34</sup>

What distinguished moviegoing from the examples of Catholic control over social life, as mentioned earlier, is that cinema exhibitors were private entrepreneurs. Schools, hospitals and the extensive social network of clubs and organizations were (semi-)publically owned, administered by the Church or were closely monitored by the so-called 'spiritual advisors' appointed to most clubs and organizations, who wielded considerable formal and informal power. In contrast, cinemas were private enterprises with a commercial goal. Still, local governments could legally intervene, as is demonstrated for instance by the age restrictions and other local bylaws controlling moviegoing. Also the Rucphen bylaw separating men from women appears to have been legally sound, since the provincial authorities upheld the measure in appeal.

So how can we explain the fact that Rucphen did not serve as a model for other Catholic policymakers? Furthermore, since the Catholic press was deadly silent on the issue, it apparently was not a subject deemed fit for public discussion. Why was this the case? Definite answers are hard in the absence of a public discussion in the Catholic press. However, it seems that separating men and women in a public venue simply went too far. Significantly, not all cinemas in the Catholic South were seen as places of social unrest and moral decay, attracting the working-class audiences that visited the *Paleis Bioscoop* in St. Willebrord. Even though explicitly Catholic cinemas did not survive in the Catholic South, and many tensions remained between authorities and the film exhibition and distribution industry, many cinema owners did enjoy better relations with the local elite and the middle classes, especially since the regulation of moviegoing developed from being mainly administered locally to a centralized regional and a national level, so the local exhibitor could function as a local intermediary adapting the international film fare to his audiences. Some exhibitors antagonized middle-class sentiments by sensationalizing the entertainment offered, while others attracted middle-class patrons by presenting their cinema as an institution of respectable amusement.<sup>35</sup> Separating deprived working-class youths in infamous St. Willebrord was one thing, as was protecting vulnerable youth from presumed moral danger through censorship, but forcing decent married couples to sit apart from each other everywhere in the Catholic South was plainly a bridge too far. In this way, the Rucphen case shows that the realization of censorship, in its various modalities, aimed at controlling and disciplining moviegoing audiences, was not a top-down affair of authorities dictating the law,

but a process of negotiation, even if it was implicit and without actual (recorded) public debate.<sup>36</sup>

The separating of men and women in the cinema was not seen as a viable policy in other European countries with Catholic populations, at least, not as far as can be established. None of the scholars present at the “Catholics and Cinema: Productions, Policies, Power” conference held in Oxford in 2011, whose research includes a variety of Catholic countries, had heard of cinemas segregated by gender.<sup>37</sup>

The Rucphen case demonstrates how the regulation of gender (and underlying sexual) relations is closely tied to class relations and opens up new and different ways to examine historical cinema audiences. For Catholic authorities, anxieties about shifting gender relations, and especially about sexual relations, were a crucial drive for controlling and disciplining the cinema. This makes a focus on gender relevant for the new cinema historiography, which during the last decade has centered attention on the social experience of moviegoing.<sup>38</sup> In classical text-oriented film studies, gender is an analytical category that is very popular with scholars and students alike. If an empirically grounded history of cinema consumption aspires to contend with the established text-oriented approaches that are dominant in film history, the still underexplored gender perspective offers opportunities in addition to the more thoroughly thematized class and ethnicity angles.

## NOTES

1. Allen, Robert C. “The Place of Space in Film Historiography.” *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 9, no. 2 (2006): 15–27.
2. McKenna, Christopher J. 2007. “Tri-racial Theaters in Robeson County, North Carolina, 1896–1940” in Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes, Robert C. Allen, eds. *Going to the Movies. Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 45–59.
3. An example can be found in Judith Thissen’s work on popular entertainment and early cinema in Jewish New York. Thissen focuses on the use and layout of cinemas and other entertainment buildings. She traces how the rise of commercial entertainment affects, among other things, the gendering of these spaces: noting, for instance, in the building plans for the renovation of a public hall into a cinema in 1904 the introduction of ladies’ restrooms, where in earlier, pre-cinema days, only men’s toilets were available in the public halls. See Thissen, Judith. 2008. “The Emergence of Cinema in Jewish New York: How the Movies Came to Rivington Street” in Corinna Müller and Harro Segeberg, eds. *Kinoöffentlichkeit/Cinema’s Public Sphere, 1895–1920*. Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 196–209.
4. An interesting exception is the work on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theater audiences in Henk Gras, Philip Hans Franses and Marius Ooms. “Did Men of Taste and Civilization Save the Stage? Theater-going in Rotterdam, 1860–1916. A Statistical Analysis of Ticket Sales.” *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 615–655.
5. E.g., *Het Vaderland* 19–01–1929; 26–5–1929.



6. To name just a selection: Jackie Stacey. 1994. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London and New York: Routledge; Janet Staiger. 1995. *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Shelley Stamp. 2000. *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Annette Kuhn. 2002. *Dreaming of Fred and Ginger: Cinema and Cultural Memory*. New York: New York University Press.
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by the exhibitor. During the conference, it was remarked that in Southern Italy, many cinemas were de facto restricted to male patronage, but this was through social custom and not enforced by law. One other piece of anecdotal evidence of gender segregation is suggested by a brief item in a 1916 Dutch trade paper, commenting on the *revoking* of a measure in the German city of Leipzig ordering men and women to be seated separately in the cinema (*Bioscoopcourant* 16–6–1916). Leipzig counted only a small Catholic minority.

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# 15 “I Think Catholics Didn’t Go to the Cinema”

## Catholic Film Exhibition Strategies and Cinema-Going Experiences in Belgium, 1930s–1960s

*Daniel Biltereyst*

In his monograph on US-European struggles over the world film dominance in the 1920s until the 1950s, *Selling Hollywood to the World*, American historian John Trumbour devotes a full chapter to film culture in the small kingdom of Belgium. Trumbour writes that, although “Belgium rarely figures prominently in the annals of cinema history” and even “failed to create a commercial film industry,” the country “emerged as the European leader in organizing international action against depravity in film.” In the Roman Catholic Church’s international strategy on film, “the Belgian church stood out as the international command-and-control centre of the movement,” so that it “at times played a more central role than the US Legion of Decency.”<sup>1</sup> This statement might appear a bit exaggerated, but as mentioned in the various contributions in this book (Introduction, Chapters 1, 5, 6, 7, 10), Belgian clergy like Abel Brohée and Felix Morlion did play a significant role in the creation and development of the International Catholic Organization for Cinema (OCIC), particularly when the international Catholic film organization moved from The Hague to Brussels in 1933.<sup>2</sup> From its headquarters in the Belgian capital, OCIC functioned as an energetic pressure group, “organizing international conferences and fostering Catholic ownership and entrepreneurship in the exhibition sector.”<sup>3</sup>

Given OCIC’s location in Brussels, the fact that Belgian Catholics played a prominent role in the international Catholic film movement was not entirely surprising. During the inter-war years, Belgians had taken leading roles in various other policy arenas in order to tighten international Catholic collaboration,<sup>4</sup> while in the field of cinema, Catholics in Belgium had shown a particularly fervent and pragmatic engagement with cinema. Via a broad network of Catholic organizations and guided by the militant spirit of Catholic Action (see Introduction), Belgian Catholics managed to become active in an exceptionally wide range of levels in the local film culture, mainly from the 1920s onwards and lasting until the 1960s. They succeeded in building a network of Catholic-inspired activities, including film distribution, exhibition, criticism, running a documentation center and a film classification board—all under the umbrella of the Catholic Film

Action (CFA).<sup>5</sup> In addition to the overall aim of ‘purifying’ or moralizing cinema according to Catholic beliefs and morality, the CFA ultimately tried to create a segregated viewing pattern among the community of Catholic cinema-goers.

After looking at the context and the structure of the Belgian CFA and at its engagement in the film business and exhibition in particular, this chapter aims to confront these policies with issues of audiences’ experiences. Using an oral history methodology,<sup>6</sup> the question here is whether audiences in their practice of film consumption and cinema-going were aware of, and eventually experienced and rejected, top-down pressures. Inspired by what has been called “new cinema history,” this chapter tries to assess the wider historical conditions of the cinematic experience and aims to look at a social history of cinema from below.<sup>7</sup>

## HEGEMONIC CATHOLICISM

Until half a century ago, when religion declined in importance, relevance and social standing throughout most of Western Europe, Belgium had been a thriving Catholic landscape, with the Roman Catholic Church enjoying a considerable influence on people’s lives. In the 1930s, for instance, nearly 100 percent of the Belgian population was baptized (98 percent), while the organization of marriages and funerals was still to a large extent controlled by the Church (more than 80 percent).<sup>8</sup> The power of the Catholic Church was such that, for many decades after Belgium’s independency in 1830, several organizations linked either closely or tenuously to the Church had predominant roles in public life. This was especially true in the northern, Dutch-speaking part of the country, Flanders, where the Catholic Church deeply influenced political, social and cultural life. A crucial factor in establishing this hegemony was the enduring power of the (party) political movement inspired by Catholic beliefs. Within a framework of a free-market liberal democracy, Belgian politics were, for many decades, dominated by coalition governments, often with conservative liberals and Catholics. In 1884 the Catholic Party gained an absolute majority, and it retained this position until the First World War. During the inter-war years, the Catholic Party, which had close ties to the Church, continued to be in power in coalition governments, a situation that—with only a few exceptions—lasted until the mid-1990s.<sup>9</sup>

Alongside the Church, the political party and a dominant Catholic educational system, the centerpiece of the Catholic hegemony resided in a forceful labor movement. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Church had begun to support the formation of a labor union network.<sup>10</sup> While this network initially stressed its ‘anti-Socialist’ tendency, it soon developed into a major social force and a gateway for disciplining workers in accordance with Catholic beliefs and values. In a country with one of the world’s

highest trade union memberships, the Catholic workers' organization developed into a predominant network of institutions with links to political life; youth, elderly and women's organizations; leisure, cultural and educational activities; newspapers and other media and social care and health maintenance systems, as well as to financial and other commercial cooperative activities.<sup>11</sup> Although most of these initiatives were not coordinated by the central Belgian Church, they took place in the wake of a wider Catholic hegemony, which gave the impression of a state-in-the-state inspired by the Christian faith and moral beliefs.

However, the power of Catholics was not undisputed, and it provoked other political-ideological sections in society to copy the institutional network concept. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, Belgian society went through a process mostly indicated by political historians as one of 'pillarization.' This concept refers to the attempt by competitive politico-ideological groups like Socialists, liberal conservatives and, to a lesser degree, Flemish nationalists to organize every aspect of citizens' lives within the same pillar or network of institutions.<sup>12</sup> In terms of the number of organizations, members and their collective societal influence, the Catholic pillar was by far the most successful one, with the Church acting in the background as an influential meta-institution (see Introduction). In practice, this meant that the Catholic pillar tried to influence the individual's cultural, social and political life from birth to death. This all-encompassing, 360-degree policy extended from Catholic-inspired schools, hospitals and other organizations within the medical and health care system to institutions dealing with finance (banks, insurance), work (e.g., a Catholic trade union), politics (e.g., Christian -democratic parties), sports (football and other clubs, a Catholic football competition) and media and cultural life (brass bands, newspapers, book clubs, publishing houses), as well as to other leisure activities (youth organizations, travel agencies, holiday homes). This reactive policy, which made Belgium into a highly segregated society with functional differentiation and vertical pluralism, reached its apex in the 1950s. From the 1960s onwards, the Church faced an acute crisis (e.g., a mass exodus of clergy and seminarians leaving the institution and declining mass attendance). This membership crisis ran parallel to increased secularization and other social and political tendencies, which started to undermine the traditional pillars, including the dominant Catholic one.<sup>13</sup>

## CATHOLICS' MILITANT ENGAGEMENT WITH CINEMA

It was within these wider historical conditions that Catholics started to become engaged with cinema and the film business in Belgium. From the medium's inception onwards, the country had an open film market with a wide range of cinemas, high levels of film attendance and large numbers of imported films, mainly from the United States and France. Catholic Church

leaders had recognized the 'film problem' quite early on, with bishops sending a Pastoral Letter in July 1913, with a severe warning against the dangers of cinema.<sup>14</sup> However, by that time, priests had already started using the film medium as a tool for education, instruction and entertainment. Before the Great War, many cities and towns had Catholic cinemas or venues where movies were screened on a regular basis.<sup>15</sup>

After the war, these dispersed to a large extent, and uncoordinated initiatives in the field of film exhibition were supplemented by activity in the fields of film production and distribution. Inspired by French and German initiatives in this field (e.g., Etoile Film, Leo Films; see Chapter 6), the Belgian film company Brabo Films was founded in 1920 by Brohée. Like many such companies, however, Brabo Films had great difficulties surviving in a small and highly competitive market.<sup>16</sup>

In 1925, during a congress on Catholicism and the movies held in Brussels, the idea of a central network for Catholic cinemas was discussed. A year later, such a central organization was launched,<sup>17</sup> although it only gained an official status in February 1928. This Catholic Film Central (CFC, in Dutch: *Katholieke Filmcentrale*, in French: *Central Catholique du Film*) tried to operate as a cooperative and a lobby, defending the interests of the growing network of Catholic cinemas (e.g., by trying to get better terms for the purchase of movies from commercial distributors). Over the next few years, the CFC and the network of parochial and other Catholic cinemas started to stimulate a wider film movement, which would soon include operations in nearly all fields of the film scene.

In order to ensure that Catholic cinemas showed 'good' movies, the CFC started to rate them. In 1931, a Catholic Film Control Board (CFCB, in Dutch: *Katholieke Filmkeurraad*, in French: *Comité Catholique de Sélection*) was launched with the aim of classifying all movies in the Belgian film market, although it did not have, of course, any legal status in terms of cutting or censoring movies. The existence and practices of the CFCB implied a clear criticism towards, and served as a leash on, the workings of the official film control board, which was often criticized for being too liberal in terms of morality.<sup>18</sup> The CFCB was headed by priests, but also included laymen and women, who systematically rated movies by using specific codes (from 1, or movies for all, to 6, referring to very dangerous movies). Inspired by the infamous book index, the CFCB also issued 'black lists' of 'objectionable' and 'condemned' movies.

In 1930–1931, also under the instigation of the CFC, a specialized film documentation and press agency, DOCIP (*Documentation Cinématographique de la Presse*), was launched in Brussels. Under the vigorous leadership of its founder, the Dominican priest Felix Morlion, who was the driving force behind the Catholic film movement and later became a more international figure,<sup>19</sup> DOCIP became a key organization for spreading the movement's militant Catholic Action spirit.<sup>20</sup> According to Felix Morlion, who also initiated Catholic interventions in other fields of the media and

leisure,<sup>21</sup> “Catholic Action is nothing less than a total spiritual mobilisation.”<sup>22</sup> As a propaganda instrument, DOCIP developed various activities, including writing film reviews for Catholic newspapers and magazines, editing a weekly film guide (*Filmleiding*) and spreading the CFCB’s moral values through leaflets which were put in church portals and other public buildings. Beginning in 1933, when OCIC moved to Brussels, DOCIP gained a more international scope.<sup>23</sup>

1931 also saw the launch of a new distribution house, Filmavox, which replaced Brabo Films. As an independent commercial distributor, Filmavox strived for a more neutral profile in the market by working for Catholic as well as for commercial film theaters. Another development in this overall Catholic film movement was the creation of a network of local film leagues. Inspired by the American Legion of Decency, whose boycotts and successful actions were closely followed in DOCIP’s publications, a wider mass



Figure 15.1 Devotional picture “Crusade for the Motion Picture’s Moral Improvement, sought by Pope Pius XI” (probably 1937). This picture was spread all over the Flemish Catholic community and contained a film pledge, clearly inspired by the American Legion of Decency’s example. In the pledge, references are made to *Vigilanti cura*, the actions by the Catholic Film League and the Catholic Film Control Board.

Source: Author’s personal archive.



movement was created. This Catholic Film League (CFL, in Dutch: *Katholieke Filmliga*; in French: *Ligue Catholique du Film*) worked with local units that organized screenings and disseminated Catholic ideas on film through DOCIP's magazines and leaflets, as well as the CFCB's ratings. They were also central in organizing action and boycotts against 'unhealthy' pictures and cinemas.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, in 1933, all of the aforementioned organizations were officially brought together under one umbrella, the Catholic Film Action (CFA, in Dutch: *Katholieke Filmactie*; in French: *Centre Catholique d'Action Cinématographique*). The CFA operated as the central commanding post for the whole movement, consisting of the network of cinemas (CFC), a censorship board (CFCB), a press and propaganda department (DOCIP), magazines and publications (DOCIP's reviews were published in many leading newspapers such as *De Standaard*) and a network of local film activists and organizations (CFL). The CFA also maintained close ties to a distributor operating relatively independently in the market (Filmavox).

Although film production was a missing link,<sup>25</sup> it is clear that from 1926 to 1933, the Belgian Catholics had created a strong network of



Figure 15.2 Father Felix Morlion (back) on the set of *De Witte* (*Whitey*, 1934), talking to the popular Flemish writer Ernest Claes, film director Jan Vanderheyden and composer Renaat Veremans. Although Catholics were quite unsuccessful in film productions, they tried to influence local popular film productions like this one, which was one of the first Flemish talkies.

Source: Archief Ernest Claesgenootschap.

organizations, which tackled the film problem in an integrated manner.<sup>26</sup> In trying to export its ideas through the Brussels OCIC headquarters, the efforts of the CFA were soon recognized by the Vatican. In April 1934, Cardinal Pacelli published a public letter to the international Catholic film movement's president, Canon Brohée. In this letter, entitled *Le Pape et le Problème du Cinéma* (The Pope and the Film Problem), Cardinal Pacelli recognized and praised OCIC's apostolic work. For Brohée, this letter was nothing less than the pope's "formal marching order for Catholics to organize themselves efficiently in the domain of cinema."<sup>27</sup>

## POWER IN THE EXHIBITION MARKET?

Although most of these initiatives were not coordinated by the Belgian Church, they were nonetheless products of the 360-degree segregation project mentioned earlier. That is, the collective effort to build an institutional wall around the community of believers in order to protect them from modern secularizing society.<sup>28</sup> Discursively, the Catholic film movement tried to present itself as a power bloc, often using a nearly military or guerilla terminology with words such as 'legion,' 'marching order,' 'crusade,' 'action,' 'strategy,' 'boycott' and 'bloc' itself. The Catholic Action philosophy and the Legion of Decency's successes further inspired Belgian Catholics in the 1930s to stress discipline, hierarchy and clerical leadership, and to strengthen their concrete strategies and actions.<sup>29</sup> These included several highly publicized demonstrations before, and boycotts of, cinemas screening 'bad' movies. So, rhetorically, the film movement presented itself as a strong disciplining force within the field of cinema. The key question, of course, is whether Catholics enjoyed decisive power in the film market, as well as whether they really influenced audiences in their cinema-going practices.

Concentrating first on the exhibition market, it is clear that Catholics succeeded in building a significant network of cinemas, especially when looking at the number of venues screening films. At the dawn of the Great War, Catholics already seemed to control approximately 10 percent of the film market.<sup>30</sup> In the 1920s, the network of Catholic-inspired film venues continued to grow, especially after the launch of the CFC. In 1930, the CFC claimed to have more than 200 cinemas in its network.<sup>31</sup> In his typically excitable style, Morlion confirmed this figure, commenting that in Belgium in 1932, more than 500 film venues followed the Catholic spirit.<sup>32</sup> However, he immediately added that these were mostly noncommercial film venues in parish and workers' halls. In other documents originating from the CFA and OCIC, similar high numbers of cinemas were also mentioned. In excess of 300 cinemas were said to be part of the Catholic movement.<sup>33</sup> These figures are even more striking when put into context alongside the wider Belgian exhibition scene. According to one source, Belgium had some 1129 cinemas in 1925, but lost a third by the end of the decade (772 in 1929).

In the 1930s, the Belgian exhibition circuit once again increased, up to 984 theaters in 1930, climbing to a peak of 1128 in 1934.<sup>34</sup>

So, this would mean that, if Morlion was right, Catholics controlled at least one-third of the film market. However, there are many reasons to have severe doubts over the Catholics' victorious public discourse. In addition to a lack of reliable data, we need to acknowledge that many of these venues were not regular cinemas, but often parish halls and other types of multi-purpose venues, like schools, that only occasionally screened films. Catholic venues were also only rarely mentioned in official listings and in those published by corporate film organizations like the Belgian association of cinema owners, with whom Catholics fought a major battle over tax evasion and unfair competition.

In order to get a better picture of the presence of Catholic-linked cinemas, a series of in-depth case studies were conducted on local film exploitation histories in a sample of Flemish cities.<sup>35</sup> A closer look at movie theaters in sixty-four cities and towns in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (a sample of 19 percent of all cities/towns) produced some stunning results. First of all, the study confirmed the relatively large proportion of ideologically oriented film exhibition. In the period between the 1920s and the 1960s, pillarized venues accounted for about one-quarter and one-third of all film screening places (Table 15.1). In most of the towns or cities in the sample, at least some form of pillarized film exhibition took place. Only in ten out of the sixty-four cities were no regular, ideologically inspired film exhibition initiatives found.

*Table 15.1* The number and share of pillarized film venues in a sample of Flemish cities (n = 64)

	Total number of film venues	Catholic venues	Socialist venues	Liberal venues	Flemish- Nationalist venues	Number of pillarized film venues	% of pillarized film venues
1910–1920	86	7	4	3	1	15	17.4
1920–1930	163	17	14	9	2	42	25.8
1930–1940	183	30	15	11	7	63	34.4
1940–1950	180	41	12	11	3	67	37.2
1950–1960	202	45	11	10		66	32.7
1960–1970	179	33	11	10		54	30.2
1970–1980	105	16	5	5		26	24.8
1980–1990	65	8	1	1		10	15.4
1990–2000	34	2				2	5.9

A second result confirmed the Catholics' dominance within this section of ideologically inspired cinemas. Catholics clearly took the lead here. In most cities, there was at least one Catholic cinema, and in nineteen locations, Catholic cinemas were the only ones to show films on a regular basis. A third finding reconfirms the importance of the post-war period for ideological film screening practices: there was a gradual growth until the 1950s, with the proportion of pillarized exhibition expanding from 17.4 percent in the 1910s to 37.2 percent three decades later. From the 1960s onwards, when overall cinema attendance figures collapsed, the number of pillarized film venues decreased more dramatically than commercial theaters.

Catholics might have dominated pillarized viewing facilities, but their power on the overall market remained relatively weak. Catholic film leaders knew this, and they discussed the problem in some of their internal documents.<sup>36</sup> They were also well aware of the fact that parish halls, parochial cinemas and some commercial film theaters linked to the CFC were mostly economically less important than regular 'neutral' cinemas. The latter were, as one document claims, much more important because "their economic value exceeded the one of Catholic venues."<sup>37</sup> Felix Morlion knew about these difficulties and he added that, compared to commercial cinemas, Catholic venues often bore the connotation of being inferior in terms of equipment and luxury. Likewise, they often screened older pictures.<sup>38</sup> Most cinemas linked to the movement were also located in smaller towns, while bigger cities were underrepresented. In Brussels, for example, only 5 out of the 103 cinemas could be considered in 1937 to be part of the Catholic network.<sup>39</sup>

## AUDIENCES' CINEMA-GOING EXPERIENCES

Although the Catholic film movement had been relatively successful in creating a network of film venues in smaller towns and in more rural areas, one might question whether this ambition to create a pillarized viewing nation had really been successful. To what extent were these efforts to guide audiences in choosing 'good' pictures really fruitful? How did people experience pillarized cinemas compared to commercial venues? How did people experience the Catholics' disciplinarian power in these venues? These questions all relate to audiences' everyday experiences of how ideological pillar organizations sought to influence film culture and cinema-going habits.

In considering these issues, it is necessary to think about the different kinds of power, and in this context, Michel de Certeau's well-known distinction between strategies and tactics remains useful.<sup>40</sup> In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau links the concept of strategies to a top-down power exercised by institutions acting as producers of "will and power." These subjects have access to a place or an institutional location that allows

them to develop a strategy and order social reality. Operating from their headquarters in Brussels, the CFC was able to develop such well-coordinated strategies with the intention of influencing ordinary people in their cinema-going practices. On the other hand, according to de Certeau, such tactics are more often associated with individuals or consumers, who are not necessarily powerless or passive objects. Tactical power relates to everyday practices of consumption, including such activities as cinema-going, whereby the weak can make use of the strong in unexpected ways according to their own use, taste and given opportunities. For de Certeau, these tactics, or bottom-up power, include the possibility of contestation and critique. In our case, we are considering the tactics deployed by viewers to avoid the guidelines given by religious film organizations and to maneuver around these controls.

In an attempt to better understand such audience tactics, we engaged with the lived experiences of ordinary moviegoers within their social, historical and cultural contexts. By means of individual in-depth interviews, and inspired by Annette Kuhn's "ethnohistory" approach, we investigated the role of cinema within audiences' everyday life and leisure culture.<sup>41</sup> This contribution relies on a large oral history project,<sup>42</sup> from which accounts of pillarized viewing patterns were selected. Taking into account that the peak of movie attendance was by people yet to reach the age of 25, most of our respondents' stories focused on the period between the 1930s and mid-1970s. Although this is a very broad time span, many respondents talked about it as if it was one homogeneous period. As other oral history studies have underlined, this is partly due to the fact that memories are highly selective and subjective, distorted by time and clouded by nostalgia—which all pose problems for interpretation.<sup>43</sup>

These considerations have wide-ranging implications for historical research, especially for the issues at stake in this chapter. The people concerned might want to either minimize or exaggerate the past impact of the Church and other societal institutions that have lost a good deal of their power today. This might particularly be the case for the Catholic Church, but also by extension for the other traditional pillars. Analyzing the interview transcripts in this light, we came to the conclusion that most respondents confirmed the moral and societal power of the Roman Catholic Church for the period they were discussing. They also knew about the Catholic film initiatives because, as one respondent argued, "in nearly every village there was a priest who had a projector . . . and a film venue" (JV,<sup>44</sup> male, born in 1930). According to another male respondent discussing the post-war period, the Church had effective power in the field of cinema because "priests talked about film when they were in their pulpit" and "yes, the church could make or break a movie" (GVV, male, 1936).

While these observations seem to confirm religious power, respondents often minimized its influence when discussing their own moviegoing habits, insisting with some conviction that they choose their theaters and movies

freely. Ideology, it seemed, did not matter because “people didn’t worry about it”:

Even in the socialist cinema people didn’t talk about politics. In fact, it was not discussed in any of the film venues. They did, however, in the cafés near the cinemas, but never in there. (AVM, male, 1919)

While the film theater was considered a depoliticized or apolitical space, people choose a cinema on the basis of the quality and attractiveness of the program and its atmosphere, rather than on the basis of any ideological considerations. Cinemas in a Socialist network were perceived as being somewhat more akin to the regular cinema experience, at least at the level of the variety of movies. Catholic movie venues, however, were often seen as family cinemas, or as the ideal places to go and see movies with children and other relatives. The movies screened in these venues were chosen by the CFC or by local priests so that, as one interviewee put it, people “knew that one shouldn’t expect too many dangerous things” (GM, male, 1921). Deciding whether to visit a commercial or a Catholic theater depended on social habits as well as on its location in the neighborhood and on the ticket price. If the purpose was to have a day out with the family and see a movie and spend little money on it, then a Catholic movie theater became a potential choice. But when going out with their partner or with friends, Catholic theaters were a less attractive option because of their strict rules of conduct, and our Catholic respondents opted to go to a commercial theater instead.

When we asked Catholic respondents to describe the Catholic movie theaters in the city, it immediately became clear that this type of theater never even came close to being a viable alternative to the commercial circuit. Catholic cinemas and the other venues in the pillarized system were usually cheaper, but respondents often described them as “not real cinemas,” especially when compared to city-center picture palaces. Many of the characteristics with which they associated Catholic movie theaters stood in direct opposition to their expectations of a ‘real’ cinema. In fact, Catholic venues were described as small, dark, uncomfortable and as technically less suitable for movie screenings.

I sometimes went to Catholic cinemas. But the seats there were really uncomfortable, and they were not real cinemas. The Rex or Metro, those were cinemas. [They were] really luxurious and had the best movies. (EM, female, 1923)

Programming was another point of concern. Most Catholic cinemas had only a limited number of screenings per week, and often opened only at weekends. Commercial cinemas had continuous programming on a daily basis, so that people could walk in at any time they wanted. Catholic venues

lacked this valued image of accessibility, which enabled cinema to become the dominant form of leisure activity. In addition, the films screened in Catholic theaters were frequently considered to be second rate, old and inferior to the ones played at commercial theaters.

What did they show? Films that were really old and totally worn-out, the leftovers really. The ones they could get at a cheap price, because they couldn't afford expensive movies. They played one or two box office hits from a few years before, but all the rest . . . well, that was just what they could get. (JA, male, 1941)

In comparison to the big cities, the tension between ideological and commercial theaters in smaller villages was much higher. In Flanders, it was not uncommon for small villages to have two or three movie houses, usually including a Catholic venue and sometimes a Socialist one. Many respondents indicated that in these small-scale communities with a high level of social control, local priests often preached against commercial theaters and 'bad movies.' The priests' moral power also worked on a face-to-face and interpersonal level, for instance, through pressure exerted on cinema owners or other people working in the local film business:

Our local priest was absolutely against our cinema. He regularly visited my aunt (who owned the local movie theater) to drink coffee. But whenever he was in the pulpit during Mass, he was always preaching against the cinema. (MVD, male, 1934)

The Catholic film organization also made sure that its film classification codes were nailed to the church door, in schools and other public spaces within the Catholic network. The codes were also published in a variety of magazines, leaflets and newspapers with a Catholic orientation. When the codes used by the CFC were mentioned to our respondents, they immediately produced a smile of recognition from almost everyone asked. Many of our Catholic respondents testified that they used the classification system exactly as intended by the Catholic leaders, and that parents also used the codes to decide which movies were suitable for their children. The system, however, also had an opposite effect, with forbidden movies generating a strong audience appeal. Stories of children sneaking into adult screenings and of Catholic adults tempted to see a forbidden movie also featured prominently in our interviews.

Sure, as a Catholic you had to be good. But these quotations in the newspapers were excellent to show you where kids weren't allowed, so you'd know that those were the ones you definitely had to see! (AV, male, 1933)

Another recurrent item in interviews, both with Catholic and other respondents, referred to the Church's continuing ambiguous attitude towards cinema, with an underlying feeling of hostility, rejection or negation:

I think Catholics didn't go to the cinema. Maybe it was too popular for them. At that time people looked at it as somewhat pernicious. (DVA, female, 1936)

Yes, they were against film. But that didn't really influence me and my cinema-going behavior. . . . Maybe a bit. Especially when at home they were thinking the same. (MH, female, 1928)

In discussing those censorial forces, respondents not only referred to priests, classification codes and other initiatives taken by the Catholic film movement. A similar latent hostility and severity towards cinema was also mentioned when talking about Catholic schools. A female respondent with a Socialist background argued:

I had friends who went to a Catholic school for girls, and yes, movies . . . No, they couldn't see them, or they were punished if they went without permission.

Yes, there were taboos, taboos! (AL, female, 1942)

Respondents also often referred to their parents as being very strict and complying with the Catholics' rejection and severity:

Yes, I was raised very severe. Very Catholic. My parents decided which films I could see. Even till I was married they choose the movie [laughs]. Till I was twenty-four. (CV, female, 1937)

The overall feeling coming out of these interviews with the Catholic respondents was that they didn't deny the Church's influence. The Church was seen as a meta-institution whose values and beliefs were shared and operationalized by priests, militants of the Catholic film movement, school teachers and even parents. However, this exploration of oral history accounts also indicates that people developed resistance tactics, from rejecting classification codes to considering Catholic venues inferior, and attending commercial film theaters instead.

## CONCLUSION

Given the strongly segregated Belgian society, where Catholics succeeded in building a large network of associated organizations, it was no surprise that they also developed a practical and integrated answer to one of the key problems of modern society, i.e., film. The war on cinema was fought at many



levels, including attempts to fight the film business with its own weapons to compete directly with commercial film distributors and exhibitors. At other levels, the movement invoked the Church's moral hegemony in an attempt to impose its values (e.g., classification codes). The central aim of Catholics' engagement with film was to create a segregated viewing pattern and to install a particular institutional interpretative frame for enjoying the pictures.

Catholic leaders in Belgium, who had long followed Pope Pius XI in his view that cinema was a dangerous modern means of diversion, developed an integrated strategy which in turn attracted the Vatican's attention when it reformulated its view on the film problem. Although the Belgian Catholics' fervent engagement was recognized internationally, this contribution raised questions as to their efficiency. Unlike some key societal fields like trade unions, the school system and hospitals where Catholics succeeded (until today) to maintain a firm grip, film exhibition managed not to be deeply influenced by a religious impetus.

The oral history section doesn't provide definitive answers on audiences' film experiences, which were probably much more characterized by porosity and complexity than the respondents could (or would) chose to remember. However, on the basis of their statements, we could come to the conclusion that people were aware of the Catholics' attempts to discipline their cinema-going behavior. Likewise, they indicated how these moral regulations could be resisted. People neglected these rules by attending regular 'uncontrolled' cinemas, up to the point where classification codes could have an inverse effect by promoting forbidden movies. In the respondents' memories, however, these tactics frequently remained innocent and playful, at least in the context of cinema, rather than constituting a conscious act of resistance. Catholics' attempts to create a pillarized viewing pattern were explicitly denounced by some, and it was often seen as annoying by regular film audiences, but people also seemed to look on it as part of the game of viewing, and as acceptable as long as people believed they had a choice. For the Church, being involved in a battle with the film business was a risky enterprise. While fighting 'bad' films, they constrainedly entered the realm of the movie business and its promotion of consumerism<sup>45</sup> and entertainment, and of cinema as a joyful, depoliticized space.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank Lies Van de Vijver for her help, especially for compiling the data on exhibition and oral histories.

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# 16 Moralizing Cinema While Attracting Audiences

## Catholic Film Exhibition in Post-War Rome

*Daniela Treveri Gennari*

Because commercial film production was seen as a danger to the morality of the Church, Italian Catholics developed the idea of exerting a positive influence over producers by creating an extensive network of parish cinemas where films could be rigorously selected and screened. While from a religious point of view, parish cinemas were meant to be a way of spreading an evangelical message, from a purely commercial perspective, they were businesses like every other cinema. This system provided the Vatican with a means of exerting pressure on the Italian film industry. However, when one considers the programming, the marketing processes and the oral history, a new picture emerges. While parish cinemas could only show films approved by the Censorship Commission of the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico* (Catholic Cinema Center, hereafter CCC) to be screened in religious venues, in practice, films officially only considered suitable in a public venue (*For all* and *For all with appropriate changes*) were often still shown in parish cinemas. This was a consequence of the limited number of ‘suitable’ films available at the time. Therefore, if the process of both moralizing cinema and attracting audiences employed by the Vatican in conjunction with the government presented profuse compromises, oral history allows us for the first time to better comprehend how the educational role of a parish cinema network was perceived by its actual audiences. Rome is used here as a case study because it is the center of the Catholic world, housing the Vatican, the Catholic curia and all the main Catholic administration offices. In responding to Martin Barker’s questions “What spaces and traditions are available to people, and how do these shape and enable participation?” and “What information, comparisons, judgments, expectations, hopes and fears precede and then accompany encounters?”<sup>1</sup> this chapter analyzes 325 questionnaires followed by thirty-two video interviews.<sup>2</sup> Looking at the parish cinemas as spaces available to Roman audiences in the post-war period and analyzing the audience’s responses concerning this particular type of space allow us to understand how they shaped and enabled participation in the capital’s audiences. Moreover, the chapter attempts to discover whether the process of moralizing audiences was successful in Rome and how it was remembered by its protagonists.

## A CINEMA IN EACH PARISH: CATHOLIC CINEMAS IN POST-WAR ITALY

The above-mentioned office [a permanent national reviewing office] will likewise look after the organization of existing motion picture theatres belonging to parishes and to Catholic associations so that they may be guaranteed reviewed and approved films. Through the organization of these halls, which are often known to the cinema industry as good clients, it will be possible to advance a new claim, namely that the industry produce motion pictures which conform entirely to our standards. Such films may then readily be shown not only in the Catholic halls but also in others.<sup>3</sup>

With these words, in 1936, Pius XI informed the Catholic world of the ways to influence film production through an energetic and organized establishment of parish exhibition. This would activate its moralizing process not just in its own circuit of cinemas, but eventually in all commercial sites as well. Starting in 1936, parish cinemas developed into an extensive network of venues that—regulated since 1949 by the ACEC (*Azione Cattolica Esercenti Cinema*, or Catholic Exhibitors' Association)—numbered about 4000 by 1954 and represented a third of the total exhibition sector.<sup>4</sup> In line with Pius XI's view on the role of parish cinemas, Monsignor Francesco Dalla Zuanna, president of ACEC, praised their education and moral targets as active ways to support apostolate and pastoral preaching.<sup>5</sup> Exerting pressure on film production through a Catholic exhibition network was not, however, the only aim of parish cinemas. Cardinal Giuseppe Siri, archbishop of Genoa, reminded Catholics of another significant role parish cinemas played: to act as catalyst for the faithful to boost the vitality of the parishes themselves, thanks to the attractive role of cinema for both young and older audiences.<sup>6</sup> The analysis of parish cinema programming through the memories of its audiences will help us reflect on the actual success of both these objectives of using cinema to moralize and to attract audiences to churches.

In terms of geographical distribution, as Mariagrazia Fanchi states in this book (Chapter 13), the network of Catholic movie theaters only covered part of the Italian territory, and when one looks into the geographical presence of cinema theaters in Italy, what Fanchi describes as the "quality of presence" of the parish cinemas becomes more evident.<sup>7</sup> Most of the distribution is concentrated in the north and the center of the country, leaving the south in an isolated position.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this geographical discriminating distribution, a further distinction is worth noting: while industrial cinemas predominantly developed in major urban areas, parish cinemas developed more in smaller villages and towns.<sup>9</sup> While it is difficult to assess accurately the degree of influence exerted by the Vatican over the production of commercial films in the post-war period, it is certain that, as Giulio

Andreotti, the then-undersecretary to the president of the Council of Ministers responsible for the state intervention in the film industry, admitted, the existence of thousands of parish cinemas applied pressure on distribution and therefore on production. The network of parish cinemas, therefore, ensured dialogue with the film industry, thus stressing the importance of a moral film production.

In her essay on post-war film exhibition, Elena Mosconi reminds us how the parish cinema network consisted of a wide range of different spaces, which operated in significantly dissimilar ways.<sup>10</sup> Some of them were effectively competing with the commercial exhibition, while others were no more than a small room with a few chairs and a very occasional program. In terms of competition, while the commercial exhibition was partly protected by a series of limitations imposed on the parish cinema circuit, in practice, these restrictions did not seem to hinder the market share—especially in small villages. The curtailments imposed, in fact, were not all fully respected, nor did they constitute a severe constraint: the number of screening days (three to four per week) were maximized by the Sunday and days before a holiday; the maximum of three screenings per day was probably comparable to what was available in commercial cinemas; the ban of publicizing films outside the church area was compensated by the publicity in magazines and posters. The obligation to respect the CCC's classification for films could force a screening program of, at times, only nine films per year, which was consequently impossible to insert into the growing number of parish cinemas. Therefore, parish cinemas were often accused of showing commercial films with little concern for their moral value.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, parish cinemas were often managed in a way to achieve reductions and tax discounts, and were run by nonreligious managers more interested in profit making than in moralizing their audiences.<sup>12</sup>

While in her chapter Mariagrazia Fanchi discusses the complex issue of parish cinemas in Italy, I want to concentrate on the comparison between what the Catholic Church intended to do through its vast network of cinemas and the memories of local audiences of what those cinemas actually represented for them in their capital, Rome. This will help understand what Rajana Das defines as the “contextual formation” to audience research: how “time, place, cultural and other circumstances of viewing play formative roles in helping to shape even the most personal of responses.”<sup>13</sup> The following two sections explain how the contextual formation of post-war Catholic cinema-going in Rome was significant in shaping audiences' responses.

## ROME AND ITS PARISH AUDIENCES

With a population of over one and half million (1,651,754), in the 1950s, Rome was the largest city in Italy.<sup>14</sup> From a methodological point of view, the main difficulty in attempting to explore the geographical dimension of

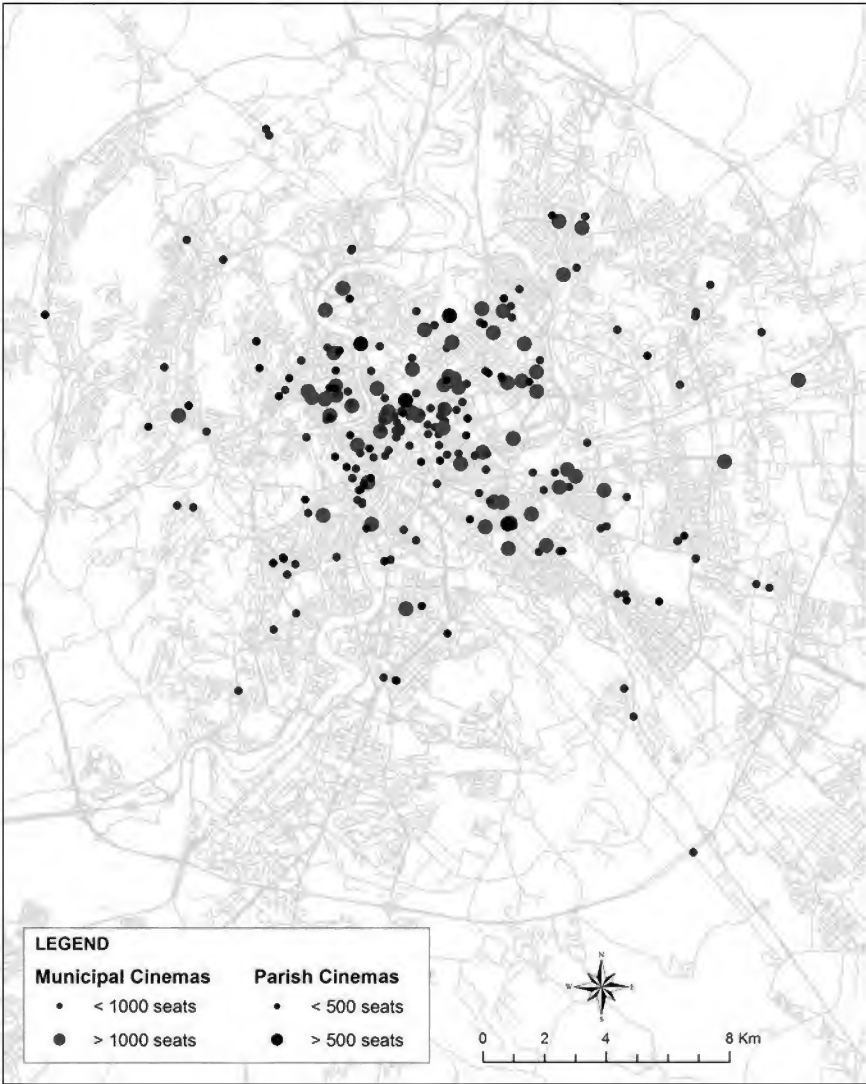
Catholic film exhibition and audiences in Rome has been how to define with certainty the total number of cinemas operating in the city under this category, as they do not appear in a reliable way on any official record of film exhibition. The source I have used in this chapter is from the SIAE (*Società Italiana Autori ed Editori*, a multipurpose society operating in the entertainment industry since 1948, as well as being the official source of data in terms of cinema theaters in the country). However, in addition to providing significant information on cinema venues in Italy, SIAE takes into account all the venues that have screened a film even for only one day, thus increasing the number of variables.<sup>15</sup> I have hence cross-referenced SIAE's data with the one provided by ACEC, which has a full database of its archive from 1949 until 1990s, rather than a year-by-year snapshot of film exhibition. The combination of the two sources should provide a fuller picture of the Catholic exhibition system in place during the post-war era.

Moreover, borrowing Klenotic's "geo-ethno-historical" approach, I have used the Geographical Information System (GIS) to map film exhibition in the capital, with the intention of addressing previously unexplored areas of Italian audience research.<sup>16</sup> By geo-referencing the cinema database record and comparing it with the oral history of cinema-going in the last section of this chapter, a dialogue between ethnographic and geographical discourses will allow me to chart not only the spatial distribution of Catholic cinemas across the city, but also new cine-spatial features in practices of cinema-going in 1950s Rome.

Certain considerations need to be made when looking at the geography of exhibition. Roman audiences had a wide network of city center and neighborhood cinemas which catered for all tastes and budgets. When considering the commercial exhibition network of around 130 cinemas, one must obviously add the extensive circuit of around 58 parish cinemas which were (like third-run venues) scattered in all three city zones, but—unlike them—had smaller seating capacities (only six of them, in fact, had more than 500 seats). However, when looking at Figure 16.1, one can immediately understand the significance of parish cinemas, not only because they represented about one-third of the total number of movie theaters available, but also because they were significantly placed in all areas of the city, and were therefore accessible to all different kinds of audiences. The geo-referencing process reveals the major strategic role that parish cinemas had in the city in relation to commercial ones. The map, in fact, shows a strong presence of small parish venues (<500 seats), especially in the outskirts of the city, where the choice of commercial venues was more limited and the need for a wider seating capacity less apparent. At the same time, it also displays a wider selection of larger parish venues (>500 seats) in the city center, where there was a need to compete with bigger and more exclusive first-run venues.

While the cinema viewing conditions of darkness and promiscuity still represented a problem for the Catholic establishment in terms of decency and morality in the south of the country, this inappropriate role of cinema





*Figure 16.1* Map showing the distribution of commercial and parish cinemas in Rome (map design: Elisa Ravazzoli, 2014).

as an instrument for the Church’s purposes was not reflected in the capital. In Rome, in fact, the network of parish cinemas was a successful Catholic operation, described in detail through the memories of its spectators. It seems that for Roman audiences, Gremigni’s theory could be applied, in that the connection between cinema and ideology is determined by the proximity and the modalities of access to the cinema theaters. In the specific case of

parish cinemas, the younger audiences were attracted to the idea of watching the film as a condition of attending a catechism class.<sup>17</sup> This is similar to Dalla Zuanna's idea of using cinema to market Catholicism and its actions. However, when Gremigni affirms that the films shown were ideologically selected in relation to the Catholic values they expressed, she overestimates the level of control over the types of films available in parish cinemas. I have already discussed how the Catholic choice on film programming was more complex than predicted and that there were several cases in which films with few Catholic values were often shown in the parish circuit.<sup>18</sup> It is worth remembering that the Catholic Church's moral concern was often at odds with the daily management of its own cinema circuit, and compromises were negotiated, especially when the parish cinema was run by a non-religious exhibitor. Obviously, when one considers that young audiences' attendance to the cinema increased in the 1950s, as youths aged 16–29 represented the majority of the cinema attendance according to a survey by DOXA (a market research and analysis organization) in 1954, the Catholic Church's concern—often expressed by Pope Pius XII—towards young audiences and exposure to inappropriate cinema is even more understandable.<sup>19</sup>

## **MEMORIES OF CATHOLIC CINEMAS FROM THEIR ROMAN AUDIENCES**

In spite of our respondents' most vivid memories of the cinema coming from their years as adolescents and young adults (15–25 years), they confirm a reminiscence bump pattern which is commonly observed, since childhood memories are often intense and demonstrate a profound engagement of the participants with the process of cinema-going in their youth.<sup>20</sup> When our respondents discussed their memories of parish cinema-going, the most predominant age of attendance is childhood, which must be borne in mind when analyzing their responses. Going back to Barker's questions, I want to investigate how parish cinemas have shaped and enabled participation, exploring the information, comparisons, judgments, expectations, hopes and fears that preceded and then accompanied encounters with parish cinema. This will allow me to assess whether these aspects of cinema-going were in line with the process of moralizing audiences as intended by the Catholic Church.

### **Information, Comparison and Judgment**

The oral history project provides us with information on various aspects of the parish cinema network: programming, censorship and gender preferences, as well as judgment on the physical qualities of the venues in comparison with commercial cinemas and the significance of those venues.

Audiences remember that parish cinemas were places where they watched predominantly old films (as a 'fourth run,' after they had passed through the entire exhibition system) and, in particular, American films. This is very much in line with a general preference of the Catholic Church towards American cinema, as expressed through the CCC film rating.<sup>21</sup> In fact, while Italian films were the highest amongst the Not recommended and Excluded categories, the same categories included only fifteen of the most successful American films between 1945 and 1960. American productions were, in fact, held by the Catholic establishment in general to be more worthwhile than national ones. This is, for instance, very much the case with American comedies (such as the ones remembered by audiences) where immoral factors were considered to be absent and their escapist nature had the single aim of distracting the spectators by making them laugh, without any underlying political purpose. These 'positive and instructive' qualities of the American comedies were, according to the Catholic press, apparently not present in their Italian counterparts.<sup>22</sup>

What is, however, more interesting in the responses to the questionnaires is the condescending and demeaning way in which parish cinema programming was described by its audiences. The films seen were *simple, silly, little films* ("filmetti") which made us laugh as children (Teresa R.). They were also cheaper than commercial films ("*più a buon mercato*"), as the parishes could not afford higher rents (Natalia); neither forbidden nor daring, but *selected* (Nandy), confirming an awareness towards the screening choices made by individual parishes. Moreover, the programming was only revealed at the last minute, which obviously did not offer audiences the opportunity for an informed decision. The genres most remembered were comedies (including Larry Semon's films as well as those by Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel with Oliver Hardy), musicals, but above all Westerns, which offered audiences great excitement (Velia, Giuliana D.T.). According to Angelo D.T., the range of films that were popular in parish cinemas was also influenced by a politics of gender: he states, in fact, how the selection of films was geared to attract boys of his age, with successes such as *Knights of the Round Table* (Richard Thorpe, 1953), *Ivanhoe* (Richard Thorpe, 1952), *The Mark of Zorro* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1940) and *The Lone Ranger* (Stuart Heisler, 1956), as well as more general cloak-and-dagger narratives. Angelo's awareness of Catholic strategic choices is further confirmed by other participants when commenting about issues of censorship. If the cutting of a kiss scene was fondly remembered by some Romans' questionnaires (LAR072, LAR071),<sup>23</sup> it is Giuseppe's interview that sheds the most light on the censorship of the films:

They were mostly chaste films, even if at the time they had not really produced risqué ones. But also *random* films, films they managed to get hold of in one way or another, films perhaps that they could get free of charge.

Giuseppe's statement confirms the discrepancy between a desire to intervene on film choice by offering a moral production, and a reality made of what he describes as "random" films, chosen more out of convenience than shared principles.<sup>24</sup> This concept of arbitrariness was used in 1950 for an article on *La Rivista del Cinematografo* (official Catholic film journal) by Ildo Avetta, a Catholic architect heavily involved in the CCC, and who later became its president.<sup>25</sup> Avetta's point, however, is very different. He claimed that the few morally acceptable films were in fact developed by coincidence and that—in order to help the 4000 parish priests in charge of Catholic cinemas—a new policy was needed: one that would encourage consciously wholesome films and not just *randomly* healthy ones. This divergence presents a first noticeable discrepancy between the ideal world and reality. While the official documents show the Catholic establishment was eager to stress the need to increase pressure on production in order to obtain a wider selection of moral films, audiences' memories actually highlight a film programming that tolerates the less decent films demanded by the public. However, a particular video interview is worth mentioning here, as it presents the official position of the Catholic Church through the eyes of a spectator: Teresa R., who recalls in detail exactly what was expected by the Vatican, as if that was the reality of the time. However, it is surprising that she remains the only respondent to consider the official attitude of the Church. When asked to describe her experience of the parish cinemas, Teresa answers:

I want to remind you that parish cinemas and parish centers with screening facilities were disseminated throughout the city. They were also very popular, because their films were carefully selected and presented themes important for people, such as love, high emotions, family-related, religious, social and historical themes which would touch people's hearts. Incidentally, one must consider that the religious feelings—which cover all aspects of life—as well as common morality were very much felt by people. Churches were crowded for Sunday Mass; many adolescents attended oratories and all children followed catechism lessons for Holy Communion and Confirmation. In every secondary school a religious teacher was present, while in primary schools the teacher would cover—amongst his/her other subjects—religion and good manners. That is how I remember the school.

Teresa's discourse reflects the obvious concern expressed in the Catholic official literature of a programming selection—that Catholic venues had to reflect Catholic principles. In her narrative, however, Teresa does not mention the fact that the reality of parish cinema screening differed from the official Catholic guidelines. This could be due to the fact that she never personally experienced any unsuitable films being screened at her local parish cinemas. Likewise, by coming from a very religious family and aware of

the dictates of the Vatican, a lack or loosening of morality in a venue that should in fact preserve that integrity, could quite obviously increase her discomfort towards such events. This specific omission raises issues in terms of the discrepancy between the official discourse and the actual practice, especially at a time in Italy when, for certain families, cinema represented a danger to women's morality and, in some cases, was a forbidden practice, "even in parish cinema" (LAR165). This obvious contextual influence over Teresa's narrative is, however, limited to a small section of the Roman population interviewed. The majority refer to cinema-going as a common activity during the 1950s, in which audiences talk about their experiences as a part of everyday life and how parish cinemas were still considered a safe environment. However, the moral guidance offered by the CCC film rating was often left to the individual's discretion. In another interview, one participant, Renata I., explains that, as a member of the Catholic Action, she would seek out the reviews of films allowed and forbidden in the Catholic press. Renata clearly states that it was not a common procedure and not many people followed these guidelines. By defining herself as a fanatic and by indicating the quarrels with her father, a Catholic man who, in spite of being a Catholic, felt he did not have to adhere to the CCC commandments, she offers an insight into how an ideal crafted by the Catholic Church was in fact open to interpretation by its members. This contradiction between understanding cinema as either entertainment or perdition, which Renata admits to have moved away from only in an adult life, was a problematic incongruity for the Church at that time.

Apart from the dubious conviction that only morally acceptable films were available in parish cinemas, the oral history narratives also provide the portrayal of a space where accessibility and convenience were greatly valued. Their ticket prices were very reasonable (LAR045, LAR320), thus removing the financial restriction for those who could not afford to attend the first- and second-run cinemas. Price discrimination was, in fact, a decisive aspect in defining patterns of cinema attendance in Rome, and cost of cinema tickets varied significantly, partly hindering the available choice. Furthermore, their locations were suitably placed next to the local churches, where Romans from their neighborhoods would regularly gather, and not only for purely religious purposes. Parish cinemas also gave children the opportunity to break free from parental restrictions and gain greater independence, as they were considered to be a safe environment they could attend on their own. Roman parish cinemas differed from the ones in villages where, as described in Livio Fantina's essay, women and men were physically separated and the censorial hand of the priest was very visible. In Rome, such moral rules were never mentioned by audiences, and the repressive role of the Church towards cinema was taken more lightly.<sup>26</sup> This level of freedom, at times criticized by the actual Catholic establishment, was what emerges most vividly in the memories of the spectators.<sup>27</sup> For many adolescents, the proximity of the parish cinemas represented the

opportunity for an intrepid experience within the confined and safe environment of the neighborhood (Giuseppina P.). This feeling of a home outside the household is further confirmed in how audiences recall the simplicity and the homely atmosphere that distinguished parish cinemas from commercial ones. Moreover, the plainness of the interiors, the use of wooden chairs instead of first-run cinemas' lavish velvet seats, the atmosphere and the simple projection against a wall in the absence of a screen help to define parish cinemas as another space, and as something different to the elegance of proper movie theaters (LAR191, LAR247). However, in spite of this level of accessibility and familiarity, the interior's simplicity and the randomness of programming, parish cinemas still represented in childhood memories an occasion to do something special and to enjoy the only amusement available for such a good value. At a time when the country was devastated by war and—as a participant (Teresa R.) states—“people had nothing and cinema represented the only form of entertainment,” combining the extraordinariness of the performance with the familiarity of the venue and of the community was the most effective way to attract young audiences, whose moral well-being was close to Pius XII's heart.<sup>28</sup>

### **Expectations, Hopes and Fears**

The atmosphere and the expectations of attending parish cinema are shared in a variety of ways in the responses to questionnaires and in the video interviews: through the descriptions of special cinema arrangements in which children were entitled to a film screening after attending a catechism class; through the discussions on the films among friends from the parish; through memories of shouting, eating, joking and drinking and more generally, by spending time with school and church friends whose company provided the real entertainment. This would seem to confirm Fantina's idea that the other spectators become the real show for children's audiences, in that they remember and comment on people in the auditorium.<sup>29</sup> In this way, the spectacle is provided both on and off the screen. The shared atmosphere of comradeship is sociable and animated, and the comments from the participants seem to confirm children's excitement for a shared experience, which is common to similar circumstances in other countries.<sup>30</sup> It is, in fact, the shared time together that is the most valued aspect of parish cinema-going. The experience is effectively an extension of the activities of the parish centers, the place where everybody knows each other and where school, church, and entertainment are all part of the same environment. It is, after all, in the oratory that the catechism is taught, where after-school sport is practiced and where amusements are available. In his interview, Angelo D.T. describes his local parish as being like a small village of about 63,000 inhabitants. In this context, the alienation of the big city is reduced by the closeness created by the local parish, where families' expectations are met and safety, friendship and well-being preserved. The anticipation of watching a film and playing in the

oratory among friends—that Giuseppina P. fondly remembers—belongs to a world with few boundaries, where nobody had to exhibit a specific dress or behavioral code, or be confined by exhibition schedules and regulations. It was a space where the fear of perdition, sinning and corruption was absent because the parish cinema was a safe place, where male and females could go without chaperones (LAR292 and LAR251). It was a place where the community could gather (LAR314), and a place that was good and decent (LAR026). In childhood memories, the existence of a venue that combined familiarity and exceptionality, domesticity and foreignness, allowed the creation of an educational space within a special entertainment atmosphere. In her contribution to this book, Mariagrazia Fanchi states that the Church's educational objectives shifted from cinema towards television in the second half of the fifties, indirectly encouraging those people at risk (mainly women and children) to reduce their cinema-going practice. What our audiences remember, though, is that while parish cinema attendance might not have played a formative role in terms of religious education because of the lack of strict control of film exhibition, it certainly developed in young Romans those social skills so often remembered in the questionnaires and interviews. While the Catholic Church was attentive to monitoring the tension between the desire to promote cinema and the need to control it, audiences were more interested in sharing a social space that was safe, familiar and extraordinary at the same time.

## CONCLUSIONS

For Italian audiences during the 1950s, cinema was by far the most popular pastime. While Rome represented at that time the center of film production and consumption, very little has been written on the habit of cinema-going in the city during the post-war period, and even less on the role parish cinemas played for audience memories. This case study of Rome in relation to parish cinema gathers new evidence specifically on Catholic exhibition memories. As age was a significant factor in the choice of cinema theaters, parish cinemas were the spaces most predominantly associated with childhood. Such cinemas acted, therefore, as temporal landmarks for autobiographical memories and represented perpetual moments of those specific times in the lifecycles of their audiences.

When looking at topographical memory and local belonging, one can reflect upon the vital relationship between the cultural geography of the city and cinema-going, especially in the case of parish cinemas. Their presence in the capital was very visible, partly because of their invaluable role of allowing children to experience cinema at low cost, especially at a time when mobility was limited and price discrimination was vital in cinema venues' selection. Furthermore, they provided a safe and familiar environment for parents to leave their youngsters unattended in a space close to

home but away from a tighter domestic control. Therefore, low ticket cost and safe surroundings constituted a strong attraction for both parents and children, which the Catholic Church was eager to exploit. As a result, parish cinemas, even more so than commercial ones, performed a formative role in audiences' childhood and cemented the process of attracting a younger population to the parish community.

The analysis of parish cinema programming through the memories of its audiences was intended to help us reflect on the actual success of a twofold aim: moralizing through cinema and attracting audiences to churches. If the oral history cannot prove for certain that the existence of parish cinemas applied pressure on distribution and therefore on production, it can certainly help us in discovering how the process of moralizing audiences was left unnoticed by its protagonists. On the contrary, what this study seems to disclose is that the Italian capital parish cinemas possibly had more success in strengthening the role of the church in a community than with the audiences' moralizing process, which was the Vatican's intention.

When the city was at its height in the development of a strong film industry and an even stronger exhibition sector, audiences' participation was—going back to Martin Barker's words—shaped and enabled by spaces and traditions which, in the case of parish cinemas, were available to satisfy their expectations and hopes. Through local parishes, the Catholic community at that time presented a 'contextual formation' for personal identity and continuity, "which place-related memories, particularly those that concern childhood places," are an important source of.<sup>31</sup>

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3. Encyclical of Pope Pius XI *Vigilanti cura* (On Motion Pictures) promulgated on June 29, 1936.
4. Fanchi, Mariagrazia. 2006. "Non censurare ma educare! L'esercizio cinematografico cattolico e il suo progetto culturale e sociale" in Eugeni Ruggero and Dario E. Viganò, eds., *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*. Roma: Ente dello Spettacolo, 106.
5. Dalla Zuanna, Francesco. 1956. "L'esercizio cattolico." *La Rivista del Cinematografo*, Vol. 6, 26.
6. Siri, Giuseppe in Baragli, Enrico. 1956. "Cinema 'nostro' in Italia," *Civiltà Cattolica*, Vol. III, quad. 2545 (June 30, 1956), 30–42, 33.
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8. In Lombardia, one cinema per 3600 people; in Sicily, one per 7250 in the early 1960s (Fanchi, 2006, 107).
9. In 1949, the Belgian Jesuit Felix A. Morlion, heavily involved in Italian cinema in the post-war period, had put pressure on parishes of 3000 small Italian



- towns to develop their own cinemas in order to fight against the potential risk of the development of commercial initiatives (see also Chapters 7 and 10). Morlion, Felix. 1949. [Redazionale], *L'ora dell'azione*, n. 16, April 21, 1949.
10. Mosconi, Elena. 2003. "Tanti punti di proiezione" in *Storia del cinema italiano 1949–53*, Venice: Marsilio, 180.
  11. Mosconi, Elena. 2003. "Tanti punti di proiezione," 177–197, 181; see also Treveri Gennari, Daniela. 2009. *Post-War Italian Cinema. American Intervention, Vatican Interests*. New York: Routledge; Fantina, Livio. 2003. "I giudizi del CCC" in *Storia del cinema italiano 1949–53*, 80–92, 83.
  12. On the Facebook group Old and New Roman Cinemas, Andrea Lesti posts what he found on the parish website linked to the Colombo Cinema in Via Vedana:
 

"Don Eugenio Fornasari, in 1951, started the adventure of providing his parish of a cinema, as the area was lacking a commercial cinema. This parish cinema, run by the parish and then subcontracted to a private who run it both in the winter and in the summer (open air) seasons, worked perfectly well until 1970s."
  13. Das, Rajana. 2011. *Interpretation*. Unpublished PhD, LSE.
  14. See <http://cinquantamila.corriere.it/storyTellerThread.php?threadId=censimento1951#> Accessed on October 24, 2012.
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  16. Klenotic, Jeffrey. 2011. "Putting Cinema History on the Map. Using GIS to Explore the Spatiality of Cinema," in Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst and Philipp Meers, eds. *Explorations in New Cinema History. Approaches and Case Studies*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 60.
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  18. Treveri Gennari, Daniela, 2009; see also Morreale Emiliano. 2011. *Così piangevano. Il cinema melò nell'Italia degli anni cinquanta*. Rome: Donzelli Editore, 84.
  19. "Gli svaghi preferiti," *Bollettino della DOXA*, 1954, 96–100; Fanchi, Mariagrazia. 2005. 'Il film ideale in relazione al soggetto, ovvero agli spettatori a cui il film è destinato' in *Pio XII e il cinema*, Dario E. Viganò, ed. Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 69.
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  21. Treveri Gennari, Daniela. 2009.
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  23. Questionnaire reference numbers.
  24. This discrepancy had already been denounced in 1937 in the pages of *La Rivista del Cinematografo* (official Catholic film magazine) by the Salesians when they affirmed: "it is extremely hard to combine film entertainment with something that reflects fully our principles" (Atti Salesiani, 1937, *La Rivista del Cinematografo*, 125–127).
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27. Baragli, Enrico. 1956. "Cinema 'nostro' in Italia," *Civiltà Cattolica*, Vol. III, quad. 2545 (June 30, 1956), 30–42, 36–37.
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# Index

- Acción Católica Mexicana 71  
 Aengenent, Mgr. J.D.J. 148, 149, 151  
*amore, L'* (love, 1948) 118, 127, 179  
 Andreotti, Giulio 10, 39, 114, 116–18,  
 120, 122, 124, 125, 127–8, 173,  
 176–84, 274, 289  
*Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) 58, 200  
 Antonioni, Michelangelo 40, 234n  
 Argentina 3, 11, 203–18  
 Associazione Cattolica Esercenti  
 Cinema (ACEC) 40, 273, 275  
 Associazione Cattolica Italiana (ACI)  
 28, 39, 174  
 audience 2, 11, 12, 28, 41, 53, 68, 70,  
 72, 75, 93, 101–2, 106, 112n,  
 160, 163, 193, 226–9, 232,  
 239–44, 249–51, 256, 261, 263,  
 264, 268, 272–83, 255, 259,  
 259, 273–6, 283; attendance  
 (film) 39, 55, 74, 104, 106, 148,  
 193, 198, 227, 249, 250, 257,  
 263, 364, 277, 280, 282; female  
 audiences, 227, 240, 249; *see*  
*also* consumption; moviegoing;  
 reception; spectators  
  
 Bassan, Alberto 41, 181  
 Beaupin, Eugène 21, 23, 26  
 Belgium 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 27–31n, 85,  
 101, 115, 201n, 243, 255–71  
*Bells of St. Mary's, The* (1945) 58, 59,  
 200  
 Benedict XV, Pope 70  
 Bergman, Ingrid 117–22, 128, 132–4,  
 200  
 Bernard, Jean 9, 43, 85–98  
 Berthier, René 110, 111  
 Bertolucci, Bernardo 40, 214, 216  
  
 Bianco e Nero 43, 117, 118, 127, 128,  
 228  
 Blasetti, Alessandro 39, 40, 179  
*Boys Town* (1938) 58, 200  
 Brabo Films 28, 258, 259  
 Brazil 28, 31n, 215  
 Breen, Joseph 2, 9, 12, 55–63, 200  
 Brennan, Earl 114, 129  
 Brohée, Abel 2, 3, 9, 24, 25, 27, 28,  
 30, 85, 87, 89, 147, 255,  
 258, 261  
 Buñuel, Luis 210, 287  
  
 Canziani, Carlo 27, 28, 45  
 Castoriadis, Cornelius, 6–7  
 Catholic Action 3, 8, 19, 20, 24, 26,  
 28, 29, 53, 100, 107, 158,  
 174, 197, 201n, 203, 206–8,  
 213, 255, 258, 259–61, 270n,  
 280; Argentine Catholic Action  
 205–8, 213; Belgian Catholic  
 Action, 8, 28, 255, 258, 259,  
 261, 270n; Dutch Catholic  
 Action, 24, 36; French Catholic  
 Action, 100, 107; Irish Catholic  
 Action, 197; Italian Catholic  
 Action, 11, 39, 77, 174, 223,  
 280; Mexican Catholic Action,  
 9, 71, 77; *see also* *Acción*  
*Católica Mexicana*; *Azione*  
*Cattolica Italiana*; *Katholieke*  
*Filmactie*  
 Catholic censorship 11, 33n, 42, 57,  
 60, 67, 68, 71–4, 76, 77, 97, 98,  
 105, 109, 117, 193, 209, 210,  
 239, 244, 246  
 Catholic Cinematographic Centre  
 (CCC) 11, 37, 39, 40, 43–5,



- 101–8, 118, 122, 127, 130n,  
158–9, 162–6, 170n, 177, 178,  
223, 226–9, 233, 234n, 272,  
274, 278–80
- Catholic films 10, 26, 28, 91, 134n,  
137, 140, 141, 146–51, 181,  
222, 223
- Catholic Union of International Studies  
20, 23, 30n
- censorship (film) 2, 11, 42, 50, 52,  
53, 57, 63, 66, 67, 69, 70,  
72–4, 76–8, 81n, 88, 94, 96,  
102, 105, 108, 109, 118, 119,  
125, 187, 195, 197, 203, 210,  
213, 215–17, 226, 234, 235,  
242, 243, 246, 250; censorship  
commissions/boards 8, 11, 37,  
55, 57, 60, 68, 74, 76, 78, 101,  
105, 110–12n, 190, 193, 197,  
203, 204, 210–15, 217, 218,  
240, 243, 244, 249; Hollywood  
censorship, 9, 52, 53, 55, 57,  
72; ideological censorship, 215,  
216; self-censorship, 67, 78,  
205; state censorship, 11, 50,  
55, 69, 74, 77, 108, 161, 164,  
178, 193, 204, 207–11, 217,  
243, 244; *see also* Catholic  
censorship, censorship of films,  
censorship of publications act;  
classification; production code  
administration
- Censorship of Films Act (1923) 193,  
196, 197
- Censorship of Publications Act (1929)  
193, 194, 196
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) 174
- Centro San Fedele 41, 47n, 181
- Chinoise, La* (1967) 215, 216
- Choderlos de Laclos, Pierre, 108
- Christian-Democracy (Catholic political  
party) 8, 11, 36, 97, 108,  
114, 115, 117, 256; *see also*  
Democrazia Cristiana
- cineforum* 35, 175
- cinemas 2, 3, 39, 41, 88, 90, 91, 95,  
106, 141, 159, 164, 193, 222,  
224–8, 232, 233n–5n, 239,  
240, 242, 258–60, 265, 268,  
273–7; Catholic cinemas 28, 39,  
40, 91, 102, 104, 107, 222–5,  
234n, 242, 243, 250, 258, 263,  
265, 270n, 273, 275, 277, 279;  
network of cinemas 106, 260,  
261, 274; parish cinemas 6,  
35–40, 45, 90, 91, 117, 118,  
179, 199, 206, 222–4, 226, 228,  
233n, 234n, 272–83; *see also*  
exhibition
- class 37, 77, 128, 133n, 174, 182, 207
- classification 63, 80n, 103, 112 ,  
214–16, 226, 255, 266–8, 274;  
age classification, 19, 193; moral  
classification 87, 88, 91–4, 97,  
194, 198
- Cold War 36, 73, 104, 174, 239,  
247–51
- Comité Catholique du Cinéma 23, 101
- Communio et progressio* 38
- Communism 21, 27, 36, 39, 61, 78,  
115, 124, 125, 130, 133n, 164,  
172, 174, 176, 195, 207, 216
- consumption 38, 233, 234, 251, 256,  
264, 282
- Criterio* 205, 208, 212, 213, 218
- de Certeau, Michel 263, 264
- De Gasperi, Alcide 114, 117, 120, 176,  
177
- Democrazia Cristiana (DC) 36, 164,  
173, 174, 176, 177, 179
- Der Neunte Tag* (The Ninth Day, 2004)  
85, 90
- De Santis, Giuseppe 36
- De Sica, Vittorio, 36, 38, 39, 130n, 179
- De Witte* (Whitey, 1934) 260
- Diary of Anne Frank, The* (1959) 88
- distribution 5, 12, 19, 27, 28, 29, 35,  
39, 40, 70, 72, 89, 91, 101, 102,  
105, 137, 218, 223, 224, 226,  
227, 242–4
- Divini illius magistri* 12n, 71
- Documentation Cinématographique de  
la Presse (DOCIP) 115, 130n,  
258–60, 270n
- dolce vita, La* (1960) 9, 36, 40, 41, 45,  
181, 185n
- Don Camillo* (The Little World of Don  
Camillo, 1952) 105, 179, 185n
- Doubt* (2008) 201
- Duvivier, Julien 101, 105, 179, 185n
- educational films 22, 24, 29, 195–7
- Eidophon 10, 137–42, 146–57
- Encyclical Letter 19, 37, 71, 73, 107,  
269n; *see also* *Communio*

- et progression, Divini illius magistri, Il fermo proposito, Miranda prorsus, Quadragismo anno, Rerum novarum, Vigilanti cura*
- England 31n, 192, 193, 198; *see also* United Kingdom
- entertainment 1–5, 24, 53, 64, 66, 68, 117, 197, 205, 225, 232, 240–4, 250, 251, 258, 280, 284n; leisure, 2, 198, 199, 241, 249, 257, 258, 264, 266
- Ernst, Georg 27, 28, 33n
- État de Siège* (State of Siege, 1973) 215, 216
- Europa '51* (1952) 123–9n, 133n, 134n, 176
- exhibition (film) 2, 3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 29, 36, 37, 39, 55, 57, 60, 66–71, 73, 75, 87, 89, 90, 91, 94, 95, 100, 102, 103, 108, 111, 132n, 192, 193, 194, 195, 204, 206, 208, 210, 212, 215, 216, 218, 240, 242–7, 250, 253, 255–8, 268, 272–5, 278, 282, 283, 289; box office, 53, 55, 26; exhibition network, 108, 273, 275; film programming 277, 279; screenings, 28, 67, 73, 104, 112n, 253n, 260, 265, 266, 274; *see also* cinemas, moviegoing
- Fabbri, Diego 39, 133n, 168, 180
- Fascism 116, 118, 174, 195
- Faute de l'abbé Mouret, La* (The Demise of Father Mouret, 1970) 217
- Fellini, Federico 9, 36, 38, 40, 41, 124, 129, 133n, 181, 216
- fermo proposito, Il* 19
- film history 5, 10, 239, 251; *see also* new cinema history
- First World War 8, 9, 19, 26, 68, 69, 101, 103, 242, 256
- Flipo, Emmanuel 10, 100, 103–13n
- France 2, 3, 10, 21, 27, 28, 31n, 110–11, 257
- Francesco giullare di Dio* (The Flowers of St. Francis, 1950) 42, 121–3, 138, 173, 177–80, 182, 185n
- Francis of Assisi 76, 123
- Gedda, Luigi 39, 45, 158, 162–5, 168n
- gender 3, 5, 6, 9–11, 26, 36, 38–40, 50, 62, 76, 89, 90, 94, 102, 109, 137, 147, 152–5n, 165, 167, 228, 232, 234n, 239–54, 260, 270, 272–4, 280
- Germania anno zero* (Germany Year Zero, 1949) 103, 179
- Germany 2, 3, 8, 28, 31n, 33n, 141, 142, 148, 151
- Going My Way* (1944) 58, 200
- Griffith, D.W. 50
- Guilty of Treason* (1949) 78, 81n
- Hays, Will 1–3, 13, 51, 53, 55, 56, 69, 70
- Hermans, Hyacinth 24–6, 138–40, 147, 153, 154, 157
- Hitchcock, Alfred 62
- Hollywood 1–5, 9, 19, 35, 36, 49–65, 70, 72, 73, 77, 164, 194, 195, 200, 205, 229; *see also* USA
- Holy Office, the 41, 47n, 174, 180, 181, 217; *see also* Vatican
- Holy See, the 1, 4, 27, 36, 165, 166; *see also* Vatican
- Holy Year at the Vatican, The* (1950) 162
- institutional turn 4, 6
- International Catholic Office for Cinema, the (OCIC) 2, 3, 9, 23, 25–30, 32n, 42, 43, 85–8, 92, 101, 110, 113n, 115, 117, 139, 146, 147, 152n, 165, 196, 198, 200, 207, 255, 259, 262, 269n
- International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation, the (CICI) 20, 21, 31n
- International Educational Cinematographic Institute, the (IECI) 22, 23, 28, 29, 30, 32n
- International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues, the (IUCWL) 22–4, 31
- Ireland 11, 189–201
- Italian Episcopal Conference 37, 44
- Italy 2, 4, 6, 8–11, 28, 35–44, 60, 114–20, 124, 125, 128–30n, 132n, 158, 161–6, 169n, 174, 175, 178, 179, 184, 192, 201n, 207, 221–8, 232–4n, 254, 273–5, 280

John XXIII, Pope 42, 167, 168

Katholieke Filmactie 260

Kuhn, Annette 250, 264

Legion of Decency (National, USA)

1–3, 9, 13n, 53–5, 60–3, 94,  
102, 205, 207, 255, 259, 261;  
Mexican Legion of Decency, 9,  
72, 74, 77

*Liaisons Dangereuses, Les* (Dangerous  
Liaisons, 1959) 108

liberalism 199, 201, 205, 210

*Lied der Schwarzen Berge, Das* (Song  
of the Black Mountain, 1933)  
148

Lord, Daniel A. 52, 65n, 72

Luxemburg 70, 85–90

Luxemburger Wort, 85, 87, 88, 90, 92–7

*Mädchen Johanna, Das* (Joan of Arc,  
1935) 92, 120, 125

Maglione, Luigi 21–3, 32n

*Man Who Played God, The* (1932) 72

Marcellini, Romolo 39, 158, 162, 163,  
165, 166

Marxism 6, 43

Mauriac, François 88

Mexico 3, 9, 23, 66–78, 87, 206, 216

*Miranda prorsus* 107, 227

modernity 2, 8, 19, 20, 37, 41, 97, 190,  
208, 217, 241

*Moine, Le* (The Monk, 1973) 217

*Monsieur Vincent* (1947) 105

Montini, Battista Giovanni 41, 43, 47n,  
117, 130, 174, 180, 181

Morlion, Felix 10, 114–134n, 173–81,  
184n, 255–63, 270n, 283n,  
284n

Motion Pictures Producers and

Distributors Association

(MPPDA) 1, 2, 5, 29, 51, 52,  
56, 59, 69

moviegoing 59, 239, 240, 242, 244,  
250, 251, 264, 268, 275

Mussolini, Benito 1, 22, 32n, 158, 161,  
163

National Film Institute (NFI) 196–9

Nazism 8, 34, 74, 95, 116, 156n, 194

neorealism 10, 11, 36, 45, 114–29,  
131n, 173, 177–9, 182; Catholic  
neorealism, 10, 114–29, 173,  
175, 177, 179–2, 185n

new cinema history 4, 5, 256

newspapers 1, 34, 38, 50, 55, 78n,  
134n, 194, 195, 198, 239,  
241, 257, 259, 260, 266, 271n;  
Catholic press, 23, 67, 106, 139,  
227, 244, 250, 278, 280

newsreels 59, 68, 77, 158, 159, 162,  
169n

Netherlands, the 2, 4, 8, 10, 11, 24,  
27, 28, 33n, 137–41, 152–4,  
239–48

*Novecento* (1977) 216

Office of Strategic Services (OSS) 114,  
171

*Old Man and the Sea, The* (1958) 88

*On the Waterfront* (1955) 60, 88, 200  
oral history 12, 256, 264, 267, 268,  
271n, 272, 275, 277, 280,  
283

Orbis Film 39, 40, 165, 166, 171, 228

Osservatore Romano, L' 39, 43, 44,  
121, 127, 182

Pacelli, Eugenio 3, 142, 143, 163, 164,  
167, 169n, 261; *see also* Pius  
XII, Pope

*Paisà* (1946) 177, 182

Pasolini, Pier Paolo 36, 40, 42–4, 88,  
289

*Pastor Angelicus* (1942) 39, 158–67,  
170n, 171n

Paul VI, Pope, 38, 43

Pius XI, Pope 1, 2, 8, 27, 32n, 37, 71,  
73, 74, 87, 120, 137, 142, 152,  
153, 154, 171, 205, 206, 259,  
268, 273, 283

Pius XII, Pope 3, 10, 11, 38, 39, 45,  
73, 86, 106, 107, 142, 158–69n,  
172n, 180, 184n, 207, 221, 230,  
233n, 277, 281

pledge (film) 54, 55, 142, 259

policy (Catholic film) 1–3, 5, 7–11,  
108, 154, 189–91, 193, 195,  
197–9, 240

*porta del cielo* (The Gate of Heaven,  
1945) 39

Portugal 8, 131n, 194

Pro Deo (movement and university)  
114–16, 122, 129n, 130n, 132n,  
174–7

Production Code Administration (PCA)  
1, 2, 9, 52–6, 57, 59–65, 72,  
73, 81n, 200, 205, 210, 213; *see*

- also Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association  
 production (film) 239, 240, 246, 248, 249, 253n, 254n  
 promotion (film) 12, 87, 105, 106, 128, 164, 204, 206, 207, 222, 226, 268  
 propaganda 19, 22, 24, 25, 27, 39, 43, 68, 73–5, 94, 100, 115, 128, 130n, 140, 147, 153, 162, 164, 166, 168, 174, 178, 182, 213, 241, 259, 260  
 public opinion 94, 115, 116, 159  
  
*Quadragesimo anno* 194  
 Quigley, Martin 52, 54, 55, 72  
  
 radio, 21, 26, 30, 44, 45, 49, 71, 77, 89, 93–5, 104, 115, 138, 139, 141, 158, 161, 166, 168, 192, 210, 226, 232, 233, 270n  
 reception 102, 103, 121, 137, 159, 161, 163, 165, 182, 185n, 189, 201n, 205  
*Religieuse, La* (The Nun, 1967) 110  
*Rerum novarum* 269n  
*ricotta, La* (1963) 42  
 Rivista del Cinematografo, la 28, 40, 42–6, 122, 127, 128, 178, 225–7, 232, 279, 284n  
 RKO, 120, 131n, 132n, 180  
*Roma città aperta* (Rome, Open City, 1945) 36  
 Rondi, Gian Luigi 114, 120–3, 127–9n, 132n–4n, 173, 177, 178, 180, 182, 184n  
 Rossellini, Roberto 10, 36, 59, 103, 116–29, 129n–34n, 173, 175–82  
 Rucphen 11, 239, 240, 245, 246, 250, 251  
 Russia 43, 51, 138, 139, 140; *see also* Soviet Union  
  
 Salazar, António 8, 195  
 Second World War 9, 10, 30, 35, 36, 44, 58, 59, 74, 102, 112n, 114, 159, 164, 168, 171n, 195, 207, 224, 228, 233n, 234n, 242  
*Segreto del Sacerdote, El* (The Priest's Secret, 1940) 76  
 secularization 40, 45, 86, 97, 199, 207, 251, 257; secularism 21, 69, 72, 101, 208  
  
*Settimane Incom, la* 122, 160  
 sexuality 53, 73, 193, 198, 200, 203, 207, 210, 218, 240; pornography, 111, 211, 215  
 Socialism 2, 72, 125  
 Società Italiana Autori ed Editori (SIAE) 223, 233n, 275  
 Society of Jesus 41, 103, 111n, 209  
 Soviet Union 19, 37, 174; *see also* Russia  
 sound 10, 52, 56, 60, 63, 72, 121, 137–41, 147, 148, 152, 153, 155, 193, 225  
 spectators 57, 62, 94, 108, 118, 191, 225–7, 240, 252, 276, 278, 280, 281  
*Stille dage i Clichy* (Quiet Days in Clichy, 1970) 94, 96, 97  
*Story of the Pope* (1946) 164  
*Stromboli, terra di Dio* (Stromboli, God's earth, 1950) 119–28, 121, 131n–133n, 173, 175, 178–82  
 Sturzo, Luigi 114, 116, 129n, 130n, 174  
*Sünderin, Die* (The Sinner, 1950) 94  
 Switzerland 3, 22, 31n, 164  
  
 technology (film) 10, 97, 137–53, 225  
 television 10, 30, 38, 45, 49, 59, 60, 104, 107, 108, 158, 159, 167–69n, 199–201, 210, 225–7, 232, 233, 282  
*Tempo si è fermato, Il* (Time Stood Still, 1959) 181  
*Teorema* (Theorem, 1968) 36, 40, 43, 44  
*terra trema, La* (The Earth Trembles, 1948) 36, 39, 40, 144  
  
 United Kingdom, the 114, 211; *see also* England  
 Universal Film 39, 40  
 USA 1, 2, 9, 19, 22, 23, 35, 37, 38, 49, 114, 130, 153, 164, 173, 174, 178, 198, 278  
  
 Vadim, Roger 62, 94, 108  
 van Domburg, A.J.P. 140, 147, 148, 150, 151  
*Vangelo secondo Matteo, Il* (The Gospel According to St. Matthew, 1964) 36, 40, 42, 44  
 Vatican, the 1, 5, 10, 12, 15n, 20, 21–3, 27, 29, 32n, 56, 64, 70–2, 115,

- 122, 128, 130n, 137, 153, 162,  
164, 169n, 170n, 173, 174, 261,  
268, 272; First Vatican Council,  
158; Second Vatican Council,  
37, 38, 46, 58, 110, 199, 209,  
229, 231
- Vatican of Pius XII, The* (1940) 162
- Venice Film Festival 32n, 42, 43, 119,  
177–80, 185n
- Verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum,  
Die* (The Lost Honor of  
Katharina Blum, 1975) 216
- Viaggio in Italia* (Journey to Italy,  
1954) 128
- Vie et la passion de Jésus Christ, La*  
(The Life and Passion of Jesus  
Christ, 1898) 66
- Vigilanti cura* 1–3, 11, 37, 45, 73,  
92, 154, 162, 170n, 194–6,  
199, 205, 207, 223,  
233n, 259
- Visconti, Lucino 36, 38–40, 166
- Zavattini, Cesare, 36, 129n, 165, 166